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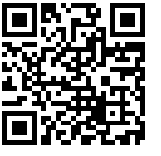

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A Marriage in Burmah

Mrs. M. CHAN-TOON

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A MARRIAGE IN BURMAH

A NOVEL

BY

MRS M. CHAN-TOON
Author of
"Under Eastern Skies," "Told on the Pagoda,"
etc.

THIRD IMPRESSION

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PREFACE

In the following pages I have endeavoured to sketch the life of an English girl who married a native of Burmah, and to show, if only in outline, how vast is the gulf that divides the Eastern from the Western.

Of the moral aspect of the story I will say nothing, holding no brief for either party; I merely record things as they actually occurred.

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A Marriage in Burmah

CHAPTER I

"REALLY, it is the most astounding marriage I ever heard of!"

It was Mrs M'Chatter who spoke. She was seated in a cane chair on the lawn, at the gymkhana, and was wearing her severest smile and her most becoming hat.

"He is a very good fellow, though," said Captain Rushout, of the West Kensington Fallbacks, who was sitting next to her.

"Yes; I know *all* the men say so, but it does not alter the fact that he is a native, and she is English."

"Money is like charity, only much pleasanter. Old 'What-you-may-call-'im,' his father, must be encrusted with it. Though they do say that the girl married him for love," Captain Rushout remarked, as he slowly sipped his peg.

"Dear Captain Rushout, please do not make such a demand on my credulity," the lady exclaimed impatiently.

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Just then, Mrs Mornington and Mrs Condon strolled across the lawn and joined them.

"We are talking about the bride," Mrs M'Chatter announced, after she had greeted the newcomers.

"Ah! you may well talk," replied Mrs Condon, as she dropped into a low chair; "I think the whole affair is quite disgraceful."

"George Clitheroe came down on the same boat from Calcutta," Mrs Mornington murmured; "he is most enthusiastic, full of *her* praises, which is a pleasing change. He is usually only full of whisky."

"Poor George! it takes so little to rouse him; his brain is like a piece of cotton wool that has been steeped in opium," and Mrs M'Chatter smiled an ironical smile as she said this.

"One thing alone is certain, she can't be a lady," exclaimed Mrs Condon, prodding the grass with her parasol.

"It all depends upon your definition of the word," answered Ella Mornington, beating time to the Madras Band with the toe of a very smart shoe.

"I never define the undefinable," the other retorted tartly. "I only feel sure that an English girl whose people allow her to marry a native—though he was brought up in Europe — cannot by any possibility belong to gentle people."

"He is a very decent fellow," repeated Captain Rushout (who had borrowed money from him, and hoped to borrow more); "good all-round sportsman, rides

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straight, and bets straighter, which is more than can be said for some people."

"A native—especially one who is anxious to be in our set—usually does; he'd be afraid to do otherwise," replied Mrs M'Chatter, fanning herself with a Japanese paper fan. "The thing really to be decided on is what position she will occupy here." Mrs M'Chatter spoke with decision.

Mrs Mornington sat up in her chair and looked across at her. "That lies with you, dear," she said.

"I hope she's plain-looking," interposed Mrs Condon in her pretty, spiteful way, "because then she will be so much more popular."

Mrs M'Chatter laughed. "You're pleased to be sarcastic," she remarked, adding: "As a matter of fact, I think we might *all* call on her, just as a matter of kindly curiosity—that does not really commit one to anything."

"I am afraid I must decline," answered Mrs Mornington. "English women who marry natives should not be encouraged—a few such matches, and our prestige will be all but gone; there is such a thing as setting a good example."

"Good example is what one expects from others," replied Mrs Condon.

"It's a great mistake to expect anything from anybody; to accept the unexpected is the aim of every modern intellect," announced Mrs M'Chatter in her most final manner.

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There was a pause. When Mrs M'Chatter assumed that tone, Rangoon figuratively bowed its head. Mrs M'Chatter sipped her whisky-and-soda meditatively; then she said abruptly: "But to return to the bride —what is her name? Something that sounds like Monkey!" She looked round enquiringly.

"Moung Gyaw, dear lady," corrected Mr Broaches, I.C.S., who just then came up, a somewhat ponderous specimen of the official magnate.

"Do you know him?" she enquired, looking at the newcomer.

"My boy was at the same Inn of Court with Moung Gyaw," Mr Broaches replied. "He said that there were the makings of a rather decent fellow. Of course he was spoilt in London on account of all his scholarships. He is clever, you know," pursued Mr Broaches, taking a vacant chair and ordering a Tangerine brandy. Whereupon Mrs Mornington and Mrs Condon drew together and conversed in lowered tones.

"I don't call taking scholarships a proof of cleverness," remarked Mrs M'Chatter sagely. "It's the men who make the best fight in the arena of life whom one calls clever."

Mr Broaches seated himself beside her.

"You're quite right," he said. "Still, I think from all accounts he'll do well at the Bar here, provided he escapes the failing of the native. With an English wife, he ought to; it's a tremendous pull for a native, if she is any class at all."

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"Humph!" Mrs M'Chatter responded doubtfully. "The girl little knows what lies before her."

"Just as well she doesn't," commented her companion, watching the lady keenly out of his lack-lustre eye.

"It's a mad marriage," exclaimed Mrs M'Chatter as she rose to go, "and no good will come of it, mark my words."

Then, with a curt "good-night," she strolled across to where her waiting gharri stood, near the bandstand.

"She's quite right, as she usually is — it's one of the reasons that make her so objectionable," was Mr Broaches' reflection, as he got up and bore over towards the bar. "A mad marriage, of which we shall all await the development."

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CHAPTER II

THE bride sat in her bungalow the following day, looking out on to the sun-flooded compound without. She was just twenty years old, and had the air and bearing of extreme and radiant youth.

Her reverie was a pleasant one. She had made a most unusual marriage—one that had set people wondering and talking. It was, indeed, its unusuality that had first tempted her; that, and the income of over a thousand pounds a year—with the prospect of far more in the near future, which her husband had assured her mother was his. It was comforting to reflect that the future was provided for against any accident or caprice of time or fortune. No carking cares or sordid regrets—of which she had seen enough in her childhood—would find any place in her existence henceforward. It was much indeed to be thankful for.

Meanwhile, she had been but a week in Burmah; she was amused and diverted. She had had a wonderful journey through India, that had formed a series of ever-changing pictures.

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As yet the East was a place breathing perfumed dreams, nameless and intangible, in which jewels glittered, wondrous colours glowed, and glorious pageants and people passed.

Life wore its loveliest smile to her.

Around her was all the novelty of strange scenes and stranger people. Every hour yielded some fresh surprise. She had as yet not had time to notice how coldly the eyes of her own people rested on her when she drove out of an evening. She knew as yet of no racial distinctions, or the prejudice of colour—an ignorance at once painful and pathetic.

It was true that already several cards had been dropped in the sandal-wood box at the gate, which she took as an overture of friendliness; while a very pleasant youth in the Burmah police had paid an early call and offered to drive her to see the Trooping of the Colours on the Maidan the next day—a piece of attention which, to her innocence, seemed very kind.

How could she possibly guess that this seemingly ingenuous boy had made a bet at the club to be the first to call and give a full and detailed report of the lady? And a hearty laugh he evoked when he described the interview, and the bungalow with its Burmese decorations and its jungly compound.

"So like a beastly native," he had concluded, "to have a fine carriage, and a house with one table, one chair, and one clock!"

Which remark, if not charitable, had at least the

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merit of truth. Splendour without and squalor within is truly Oriental.

However, of this, and most kindred things, Mrs Moung Gyaw was, at present, blissfully unconscious, as she continued to sit musing happily, while the crows cawed without, and the punkah jerked languidly to and fro. Presently her English maid brought her tea, and a letter, with a resplendent silver monogram on a pale-blue ground. It was her first invitation, and ran as follows :—

MRS APCAR AGNEW

Requests the pleasure of

Mr and Mrs Moung Gyaw's Company at a Dance, at the Lakes, Monday 27th, 9.30.

She read it twice; it sounded rather pleasant. She supposed all Rangoon would be there. She would wear her wedding-dress. She hoped it would be cool enough for her violet velvet evening-cloak.

There was a sound of carriage wheels approaching rapidly. Her husband was returning from office. She rose as the gharri drew up under the porch, and looked out of the shuttered window—he had brought her some pink roses and some fruit. A second later, and he had come upstairs, followed by the boy carrying a pile of law-books.

Moung Gyaw, in those days, was a slim young man of six-and-twenty, of a height quite unusual in a Burman; he had a bright intelligent face, of the true Mongolian

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type, the appearance of which a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles, kept on with some difficulty over a nose innocent of a bridge, somewhat marred. He had long, thin, listless hands, and large flat feet. He spoke English well, and without a trace of an accent. His clothes were good, and his manner natural and unaffected.

"I hope you have had a pleasant day, and not felt the heat too much," he said, as he greeted her. "A client sent you these flowers and oranges," he added. hen he stooped and kissed her.

"How kind!" she exclaimed, and took the roses in her hands. He sat down opposite to her, and she threw the invitation across to him. He carefully rubbed his glasses first with a silk handkerchief, and then read the superscription.

"We cannot go, or, at least, you cannot," he exclaimed, looking up.

"Why?" she asked,—she was arranging the flowers in a glass bowl.

"Because, although they are friends of mine, they are Eurasians," he answered. "Personally, I have no prejudices, but I want to try and get into the English set, and so the Apcars are impossible."

"I see," she said slowly. "But are you not in with the English?"

"No," She replied shortly. "hey are a lot of swaggering cads, most of them, who look down on natives."

"Then why want to know them?"

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"Oh! because it helps one on with the clients. For instance, I have great hopes of that introduction you have to Judge Little from his aunt; he's a pompous beast, but if he would only invite us to dinner, you can't think what it would mean."

He spoke very seriously, as if the subject was one of great moment.

"No, I'm sure I can't," his wife answered thoughtfully, and her black brows were distinctly arched. She put a finishing-touch to the flowers, and then came and sat down, wiping the water from her fingers with a cobwebby lace handkerchief.

"Explain this Eurasian prejudice," she said abruptly.

"I don't think it needs any explanation," he replied, as he stretched himself at full length in a long chair, and shouted for the bearer to remove his boots. "The saying goes that God made the Burman, and the soldiers the Eurasian."

At which remark his wife's cheeks reddened.

"What is the difference between an Eurasian and Mr and Mrs Chundera?" she asked, as the servant removed his shoes and socks, and he twirled his toes in an evidently pleasing freedom.

"Oh! Chundera is a Bengali, and she is a Bengali lady."

Mrs Moung Gyaw was silent for a moment, then she remarked: "I don't like him at all, he smiles in such a distressing way, and seems all oil and unction."

"Oh! Chundera is all right: in any case, we must be

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civil, because I owe him money." He spoke in a slightly ruffled tone.

"Owe him money! Is that why she enquired if the forks were silver, when they dined here the other night?"

"You are very unkind," he said impatiently. It was a noticeable thing that he rarely, if ever, replied to a question that he did not like.

"I did not mean to be," she rejoined quietly.

"I will go and change, and we'll go for a drive," he exclaimed, evidently desirous not to pursue the subject.

He rose and went to his room, pausing on the way to call out through the back window:

"Cuchwan Juldi gharri benow."

"Is it not funny," remarked Mrs Moung Gyaw, as they whirled down the Halpin Road in a red cloud of angry dust, "that your people have sent no message to me?"

"It is not their custom," he answered briefly; and if it were possible to blush, he may be said to have done so then.

He shivered a little, and felt glad that he had destroyed the letter received from his father in Akyab that morning, expressing his sentiments at his marriage in far from promising terms.

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CHAPTER III

It was at a performance at the old Assembly Rooms, where all Rangoon was gathered to witness the hydraulic efforts at comedy of a travelling theatrical company, that Mrs Moung Gyaw made her first public appearance.

There was a flutter of distinct expectancy amid the audience; there had been—there were—so many rumours. In any case, she was a natural curiosity—one at which one could not look too often or too long.

"Very overdressed!" was Mrs M'Chatter's verdict, after a prolonged stare. "Overdressed" being her usual way of describing anything that appertained to being a toilette in the unaccepted term of that much-abused word.

"Some nice diamonds!" ventured Mrs Condon, her eyes fixed enviously on a chain that was like a sparkling river of light.

"Paste!" said Mrs M'Chatter, and her lips closed with a snap over the objectionable word.

Meanwhile, the bride rapidly scanned the house, and noted with dismay the tired faces of the men, the pallid

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complexions of the women. There was not a single figure that arrested attention, or compelled the faintest admiration, with the notable exception of a lady, in a gown that left off where it should have begun, hair dressed in two pagodas bound by a brass fillet, who sat in the front row of the so-called stalls, and laughed a fat good-natured laugh every now and then.

Mrs Moung Gyaw asked who she was of a pale little Eurasian girl, the sister of a friend of her husband's, who had accompanied them, and who was feeling vaguely uncomfortable in her cotton-backed satin.

"That's Mrs Rooney," she answered, in Chee-Chee English; "and when she gets drunk, it's not on the smell of a cork."

"Gets drunk!" echoed her listener blankly.

"Yes," replied the other indifferently, "every day."

Mrs Moung Gyaw's gaze travelled once again to where Mrs Rooney sat, seeking some confirmatory evidence in her appearance of so dreadful an accusation. But Mrs Rooney had a dancing eye, and what no other woman in the place could lay claim to, a clear warm skin—in fact, except for her rotundity, the lady in question was an excellent advertisement for the beautifying effect of whisky.

Just then, Mrs M'Chatter's glance fell on the shrinking form of Hilda Gregory, the Eurasian girl, seated beside Mrs Moung Gyaw.

"Good gracious, my dear!" she exclaimed in carefully lowered tones to her companion. "Do you see

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that she actually has that black-and-tan creature with her ? "

" Yes ; but of course she knows nothing of the relationship ! " whispered Mrs Condon in reply.

" I expect not, but, really, I should have credited even a nigger with better taste than to put such a slight on his wife as that," Mrs M'Chatter answered slowly.

" It's no use crediting a nigger with anything," retorted Mrs Condon, as she flapped her paper fan vigorously to and fro. " He has the instincts of his race, and those instincts invariably make for a harem."

" But to be seen with an Eurasian, even if she were quite respectable ! Heavens ! what an irretrievable *faux pas* ! " continued Mrs M'Chatter.

" You may be sure her whole life will be a *faux pas* out here ! " Mrs Condon cried.

" I don't think she would tamely submit to very much," Mrs M'Chatter observed after a pause, bringing a long and critical examination of Mrs Moung Gyaw to an end.

" They never do, when they have those strongly-marked eyebrows," Mrs Condon responded ; and no more was said at that moment. But when they both rose at the fall of the curtain and made their way to the exit, Mrs Condon, as an evident result of much thought, murmured :

" There will be a man some day."

" Thank goodness there is always a man, when one is a woman and good-looking," replied Mrs M'Chatter,

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with one of those hearty outbursts of hers that made one forgive her so much.

"The Rangoon people are extremely rude," said Mrs Moung Gyaw with a flushed cheek—after having run the gauntlet of a hundred cold, unsympathetic eyes—as their carriage rolled rapidly home through the velvety, murmurous warmth of a Burmese night.

"You ought to feel flattered that they are so interested," Moung Gyaw replied, leaning languidly back.

Meanwhile, a chorus of remarks circulated amongst the people still standing waiting in the entrance.

"She is too tall!" "Too remarkable!" "Too stuck-up!" "Is she a lady?" "Had she money?" "Will any one know her?"

"I shall," exclaimed Mrs M'Chatter decisively, on hearing the last remark. "She is a distinct type—types are always interesting."

"Mrs M'Chatter is going to call on her," Mrs Caw Tartar, the wife of the bank manager, whispered to her spouse.

"Then, my dear Blanche, you may do likewise," he answered pompously. "Where the M'Chatters step, even angels need not be afraid to tread."

"If Mrs M'Chatter takes her up, it means social salvation," Mrs Lyaxi said, as she and Captain Lyaxi drove off in their humble ticca.

"Nonsense!" he replied, roughly banging the crazy door to. "In a mixed marriage there can be no salvation, social or otherwise."

Which remark was entirely and woefully true.

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The very next day, about one o'clock, Mrs M'Chatter, resplendent in an ill-fitting silk dress, made a formal call on the bride, who was, however, "dawaza bund," much to her visitor's chagrin. Mrs M'Chatter had promised herself at least ten minutes' patronising conversation, as a small compensation for the discomfort of dressing at such an hour. She drove back home distinctly annoyed.

Following their great social oracle, Rangoon, within the next week, from the Judicial Commissioner downwards, all left their pasteboards at the bungalow in Keighley Street.

Now, Mrs Moung Gyaw was quite ignorant about all nice social distinctions. Indeed, many a long day was to pass before she could plumb the depth that separates the man who has reached the dizzy altitude of a deputy-commissionership from the manager of a bank or the head of a large commercial house; and in these weighty affairs her husband was of little or no assistance, which led to much offence.

Meanwhile, people continued to call—people widely severed both by race and circumstances — and Mrs Moung Gyaw thought it very kind and nice of them, knowing nothing of motives, and less of men.

Moung Gyaw's eyes widened at the names accumulating on the large card-tray; even he had hardly dreamt of such general recognition, though, in taking a white wife, he had been far-seeing, and calculating on many advantages to accrue.

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It was certainly a triumph for a native, however prominent, to mix on terms of equality with the English people—a step so far in advance of anything hitherto, that he was perhaps not very much to blame if his head felt a little dizzy, and that he grew gradually to dream that it was his fame wafted all the way from the Middle Temple to Cantonments that accounted for these callers.

To his wife, it only seemed natural that those of her own colour should make friendly overtures in a foreign land, being wholly oblivious that the real reason was the very exaggerated report current anent his means, and the utterly unfounded notion that prevailed as to their financial present and future, and the amount of entertaining and champagne that was expected from them.

As a matter of fact, few positions could have been sadder than Mrs Moung Gyaw's promised to become. She had essayed what few women would have dared, and still fewer could have ever carried to an even moderately successful issue. She had many a lesson as yet to learn on that head, and, unhappily, in life we only get our lessons when they are of no use to us.

The rigid rules of prejudice and class are not to be lightly defied in this world of ours. If people do unusual things, they must be prepared to pay unusually, to the uttermost farthing, asking no favour and attempting no evasion. There was not a single person willing to set her footsteps aright, to hint advice or caution, in this

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new, strange place. On the contrary, all were coldly critical, and anxiously awaited mistakes.

Fortunately for Mrs Moung Gyaw, at these early stages of her Rangoon career she did not even dimly realise the cruelty of the women or the duplicity of the men, or how thoroughly determined they were that she should suffer.

Her first dinner-party may be accounted as the overture; it was a hopeless failure. No expense or trouble had been spared, but the guests were most unhappily chosen. Two ladies who had not been on speaking terms for years faced each other, while the wife of an official, whose next step was a lieutenant-governorship, found herself in close proximity to a lady who had been so indiscreet as to have a son before she had a husband—of which little incident the hostess was blissfully unconscious.

Conversation, like a muddy stream, circulated slowly. The looks of the dames in question were distinctly homicidal. An air of gloom settled over the party, which no amount of champagne succeeded in lifting for ever so brief a space.

The time in the drawing-room afterwards was slow torture. The ladies, as is their custom in Rangoon, made absolutely no attempt to be agreeable to each other, or to their hostess; they talked at intervals of local matters, in which Mrs Moung Gyaw had no share; they talked inevitably of "going home," and then their conversational efforts rounded themselves and ended.

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When the men came upstairs, things were hardly better; they were badly assorted, and would not mix. So, when at length the burra memsahib, a rigid matron, rose, a distinct sigh of relief seemed to come from everywhere and nowhere.

Everybody said "good-night" hurriedly and gladly, with the exception of a Major Rae, a pleasant man, in the Madras Infantry, who lingered talking. He knew Mrs Moung Gyaw slightly, and pitied her enormously. He saw further into the future than most; he had studied her somewhat, and saw that here was a frank, unsuspicious, perfectly natural, and almost morbidly sensitive girl. He decided that there was plenty of fine material there if in proper hands, but if not—if not——

At which point he brought his mental gaze to bear upon his host, and he sighed. His keen penetration told him that he was both weak and vain, than which in a man there can be no worse faults; and already, he noticed, he was somewhat inclined to drink more wine than was good for him, in order, no doubt, to acquire the necessary courage to talk with some degree of lazy assurance.

"How could any one have permitted such an unnatural marriage?" he thought angrily. Why, because this native was the son of a rich man, who had been educated in England and had acquired the thin veneer of Western thoughts and manners, should he have been honoured by the hand of a white girl? It was, in all its aspects, hateful to think of.

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Major Rae had the prejudice of his class, but, alas for these prejudices that appear so unjust to home-staying people! there is a thick substratum of justification for them. And, apart from the fact that she was a young woman, not ill to look upon, he felt a profound indignation against those unknown relations of hers who had given her future away in a manner which in time, if not immediately, would render her an outcast from all her own people. A few might stay by her, but, for the rest, it was inevitable that they would regard her as a pariah.

"Would you care to come and see the review in honour of the Queen's birthday to-morrow?" he said, as the sound of the last gharri wheels reached them from below.

"Very much," she answered eagerly, looking at him from over a large fan of pale-rose feathers.

"Then may I be permitted the honour of driving you?" he asked, rising.

"That would be very kind," she replied simply.

He was a man many years her senior, and with a grave, kind manner. There seemed no harm in accepting.

"Then shall we say 7.30?"

He had risen, and was bowing over her hand in farewell. Just then Moung Gyaw came through the doorway, having seen the other guests away.

"That will suit very well."

Major Rae then said "good-night," and his host accompanied him downstairs.

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CHAPTER IV

LEFT alone, Mrs Moung Gyaw stood just under the large central lamp between the two punkahs, the silver tissues of her dress rippling in the light.

"If this is how they behave when friendly, their enmity would be far preferable," she thought impatiently, recalling the gruesome hours just passed, but not in the least realising the reason for the indefinable aloofness of her guests. It seemed wholly impossible to her that people should voluntarily accept hospitality only in order to make one vaguely uncomfortable. She wondered, had she been inattentive, or missed some point of etiquette, or, worst fault of all, had she perchance talked too much?

"The evening was a great success." It was her husband's voice breaking across her reverie. She roused herself.

"I am glad you thought so."

"Why, didn't you?" he asked, going towards the table, on which stood spirits and glasses, and proceeding to mix himself a drink.

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"No—I did not."

"What was wrong? The people came, and they ate and drank—what more do you want?" he said, with some irritation.

"What indeed!" she echoed. "Nothing—everything—don't ask me. I can't tell you."

"I shouldn't be a bit surprised if we were invited to a burra khana at the J.C.'s," he exclaimed, swallowing a whisky peg. "What do you say?"

"I say that I sincerely hope not." Her voice seemed tired.

"You don't understand what it would mean," he exclaimed, adding: "Why, the Burmans would be enormously impressed, and the old man" [his father] "would probably send me a thousand rupees. Not that I care to go, of course"—he poured out some more whisky—"I think old Astor an awful bounder."

He spoke with a happy mixture of nervousness and insolence. A slight disgust stirred in her as she contrasted mentally the subservience of his manner at dinner to the said old bounder.

"If I thought that, I should not have been so conciliatory had I been you," she remarked.

"Oh! one has to be that—it means nothing. These people ought to be kissing one's toe, but as it is—— By the way, what was that Major Rae asking you just now?" he enquired abruptly and with some suspicion.

"To go to the Review to-morrow morning." She

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was moving towards the entrance to her bedroom as she made the reply.

"And you said 'no,' of course?"

"I accepted."

"Why do you do these idiotic things?" He spoke with a distinct show of temper.

"What idiotic things?" She paused and looked at him interrogatively.

"Why, making yourself common by promising to drive out with these insolent military paupers. You seem to know nothing of Society."

"Shall I take you as a social guide? Come! don't be silly," she rejoined, going towards him, her expression softening. "If you wish me not to go—why, then——" He shook off her touch rudely.

"I wish that you do as I tell you, now and always," he answered harshly.

She drew back. She resented his attitude.

"And if I refuse?" The words were quite quietly uttered, but her eyes flashed, and her spirit, wild and untamed as yet, rose. She, who had been so indulged hitherto, was hardly likely to easily submit to undue dictation.

His answer was a blow right across her mouth, and then he strode unsteadily to his own room, and banged the door to.

For a second she stood motionless, her handkerchief pressed against her lips to stay their intolerable trembling; then she stole slowly away to her own room,

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and being young, with all youth's unwisdom, knelt down by her bedside and cried out the heart of her, there in the silence and the darkness.

Was it for this—was it for this that she had left the old life, cut adrift from the old faces, the old ties ? Was it indeed for this ?

After a long while he came to her.

" Don't cry," he said in a somewhat shamefaced way, lacking, however, the generosity to say that he was sorry.

She rose at his words, wiping the last tears from her eyes. Her lip was blue and swollen in the dim light of the lamp that he carried in his hand. He tried to kiss her ; she drew away.

" Please leave me," she said. " I am very tired."

" You are not angry with me ? " he asked.

" No," she answered, " I am not angry ; I am tired, that is all."

Anger ! No ; anger was not the word to describe the lacerating feeling of loneliness consuming her—the sense of utterly unmerited insult that could not be avenged ; and when, after a long while, she laid her aching head on her pillow, it was only to wander wearily in many a dark valley of dreamland.

" My mistress is not well ; she regrets very much that she cannot drive this morning," Mrs Moung Gyaw's English maid, Barnett, told Major Rae the next morning when he drove up to the door in his smart tum-tum.

" Give your mistress my salaams," he said, " and tell

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her how sorry I am." He touched his topee, and drove slowly and thoughtfully away.

Barnett pursed her lips together doubtfully as she made the early tea. She was sincerely attached to her mistress, had known her for years, had accepted the post as maid from feelings of affection far more than anything else, and she was vaguely suspicious that things were not altogether as they should be. But she was both clever and discreet. She took up the tray now, and calling "Come along, Noel!" to the big mastiff dog who lay panting on the concrete floor in the hall, she went quickly upstairs.

Her mistress lay wide awake under the mosquito curtain in her darkened room. The maid opened one of the shutters cautiously, so as not to flood the interior with the strong morning light. The room was in confusion, clothes scattered in all directions.

"I was very tired last night, and threw everything anywhere, which is very unlike me," explained her mistress, sitting up in bed and keeping her handkerchief against her mouth. Barnett poured out a cup of tea and handed it under the curtain, and then moved nimbly about, opening and shutting drawers and almirahs, and laying things carefully away.

"How tiresome the rats are!" she exclaimed, calling Mrs Moung Gyaw's attention to the candles all eaten away on the dressing-table, and other evidences of their devastating progress.

"Oh! they are nothing in comparison with the

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mosquitoes; my ankles feel as if only a scrubbing-brush would give them any relief," Mrs Moung Gyaw said.

"There are worse places than England, madam," the maid replied, as she gathered up some rings and chains, and locked them up in a leather dressing-case.

"I don't see your piece of hair, nor yet your powder puff," she observed after awhile, as she straightened the brushes on the table.

"I left them on the table, they must be there."

"No, madam, they're gone; and I wouldn't be surprised if the rat took them for a nest."

Mrs Moung Gyaw gave a low amused laugh. "What does it matter?"

"But you can't get a new piece here!" Barnett was quite distressed.

"Never mind," answered Mrs Moung Gyaw; "it will be one responsibility the less. After all, the true philosophy of life is to reduce one's responsibilities."

"A nice sort of country this!" the maid muttered to herself, as she moved here and there.

Mrs Moung Gyaw watched her, much amused; then she exclaimed with sudden energy: "The rat has quite cheered me up, Barnett; I shall go for a drive to the town." Then she prepared to rise.

"Why! whatever has happened to your mouth, ma'am?" Barnett cried, surprised out of her customary discretion.

"I knocked against the wardrobe in the dark," her mistress answered with a conclusive air.

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CHAPTER V

It was a month later. The weather was growing more intolerable every day. Rangoon was wrapped in a nauseous, soul-killing heat—a heat that ice and punkahs were quite powerless to dispel.

Mrs Moung Gyaw began to feel very languid and far from well. Much of the buoyancy that every one brings with their new clothes from home was beginning to desert her, and when the buoyancy goes, there is nothing to take its place. Alone in the bungalow through the long hot hours, Mrs Moung Gyaw's painful process of disenchantment with Burmah first commenced. Her husband at that time was very much occupied, in consequence of having accepted a small officiating appointment, and became, perforce, less and less of a companion. He was tired when he reached home, and disinclined to talk, or even to drive.

Unfortunately, Mrs Moung Gyaw had not advanced in intimacy with any Rangoon memsahib; beyond calling, they left her severely alone. In spite of several dinners given by them, not one invitation had been

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extended in return, nor had they received the slightest encouragement to become candidates for memberships of the gymkhana.

Not that these trifles distressed her. She had yet to understand how much they meant in any case. Fortunately, she had too many mental resources to render her life, at least during the long day hours, ever weary. Still, she gradually began to realise that if she and happiness were ever to meet and become friends, it must be on home ground; thinking which, she brought her gaze to bear inwardly, and what she saw was not inspiring.

Although by no means willing to acknowledge it, she was forced to admit that she and her husband were, as far as sentiments and ideas went, as widely separated as if oceans rolled between. Still, she clung to him in spirit, exaggerated to herself his good qualities, condoned his many shortcomings, saw in him a victim to the unfounded prejudice of the English. It behoved her to make up for them, so she tried to build a false paradise for him and her to dwell in. However, as the bricks that went to form this pitiable edifice were rotten at the base, it was not fated to stand long. At least, so the outsiders predicted, while his wife was trying to blind her eyes to the weakness, the vanity, and instability of the character of the man she had married—proofs of which were creeping upon her day by day.

In spite of his education, and the fact that he had travelled and displayed a considerable amount of enthusiasm about all that made for intellectuality, he

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was a native—a native in every sense of that most objectionable word—afraid of his superiors, domineering towards his servants, susceptible to the most unblushing flattery, extravagant to ostentatiousness, mean beyond all meanness. Mrs Moung Gyaw, though dimly perceiving this even from the very first, was loyal to the point of not admitting their real existence even to herself.

However, it was not very long before she had a somewhat convincing proof of, at least, his meanness. It happened in this wise.

It was considerably past the due date for Barnett's wages, and, as he made no attempt to pay them, Mrs Moung Gyaw said somewhat diffidently:

"I am sorry to have to trouble you, but I want Barnett's wages, and, if you don't mind, she would like them in P.O. orders, as she wants to send them home."

"I am afraid," he replied, "that it is not convenient to pay them this week; I am awfully short of money."

"But it's only three pounds!" She was surprised into wonder.

"Yes, I know," he said irritably, "but the fact of the matter is, we shall have to get rid of Barnett and get an ayah."

"Get an ayah!" she echoed blankly. "But what folly, after paying her passage out!"

"It was a great extravagance," he muttered.

"Not with your income, surely? Besides, you know, the suggestion was your own."

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"I know—I know." He was walking up and down the room, his hands in his pockets.

"And with your income, surely——?" she repeated.

He stopped abruptly in his walk; then, without any preface or warning, said:

"I have no income, except what the officiating judgeship at present, or my practice later on, brings in." He spoke as if in defiance.

"No income!" Her voice was hoarse with dismay.

"None. None whatever."

"But you told my people——"

"Never mind what I told your people. Your mother pestered me with questions; I wanted to put her mind at rest."

"And so you lied!" Her glance swept across him with a measureless scorn.

"I did not lie," he answered indignantly. "I merely represented things as they ought to be."

"Where is the use of equivocating?" she said. "You told us that you had a thousand pounds a year, apart from your work; that you intended to retire after ten years, and that on your father's death you would get about fifty thousand pounds; and on that understanding I married you, and married without a settlement." She spoke quite calmly, while her eyes looked at him coldly and steadfastly.

"Maud"—he came nearer and took her impassive hand in his—"I loved you. I wanted you. I saw no other way, and—all is fair in love and war." He

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watched her anxiously. There was a pause, while she gathered courage; then she turned towards him and said:

"If you have no income, how was it that you came to England for six months, and that you paid for so much that you did?"

"It was all borrowed money, with the exception of a thousand rupees the old man gave me." He resumed his pacing to and fro.

"Is it paid back?"

"No—I pay the interest, but not the principal."

"Then why do we live as we are living, if we are in debt?" Her voice was chill as frost.

"Because one must make a show," he answered sullenly. He hated direct questions of disagreeable import.

"I cannot see the necessity," she replied. "More especially as we get no pleasure out of it, and our guests, unless I'm vastly mistaken, only sneer."

"You always think such horrid things," he grumbled.

"What is your salary?" she asked abruptly, trying to still the feeling of rebellion that smarted within her.

"Eight hundred a month," he replied. He would have liked to have lied, but he dared not.

"And our expenses here in the house?"

"I do not know; I keep no count."

"And your debts?"

The questions came slowly, distinctly, like water dropping on a stone.

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He threw himself down in a long chair.

"Chundera and the clerk know—I don't. Chundera lent the money."

She looked at him indignantly, a violent anger eclipsing for the moment all other feelings. He had deceived her and hers by the meanest of falsehoods, and now lay calmly there and gave her these helpless and absurd answers. What a poor, weak creature he seemed to her! He gazed at her silently and moodily. She restrained, with an effort, the intense anger that assailed her, and the merciless reproaches that rose to her lips. She knew well how little they ever availed, and what bitter memories they left. She was not one of those women who say more in five minutes than can be forgotten in a lifetime. As it was, she left him without further word, and locked herself in her own room, to face alone, as best she could, this new bitterness that had been flashed so suddenly across her life.

For two hours she sat on the side of the bed without stirring, and those two hours were among the bitterest of her life.

After awhile—she did not know how long—she heard him call loudly for the boy, to know if the evening paper had yet come; then he went to his room, at the same time ordering the carriage to be made ready.

Ten minutes later he had gone out. He felt intensely annoyed—annoyed with everything and everybody, his wife most of all. Her questions had been odious, quite

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odious, and utterly uncalled for, so he told himself, as the ponies bore him swiftly by the riverside. He felt that his dignity had been assailed; he had been so accustomed to order his Burman clerks and his servants about, that he could not realise that his wife stood on a very different footing, and that it might be impossible for him to command her at every turn, or to curb and check her actions.

He only trusted that she would not write to her own people. He must watch her letters; it might be unpleasant if she told, and he did so detest a fuss. He felt that he had been very badly used; perhaps, after all, it would have been better if he had followed his father's advice and married a Burmese girl. But no: she could not have advanced his interests in the same way; and, after all, nothing mattered in the world besides his interests.

Just then, the carriage of the Judicial Commissioner passed him, and he received a most gracious bow from the occupants.

It was a case in point.

Married to a Burmese girl, he would have had to salaam the burra memsahib, just like a baboo. But now—now it was different. He exhaled gratification at every pore.

He leant back and lit a cigarette. Yes, he had done well for himself. Perhaps, after all—this with reluctance—something was due to her; and so thinking, he directed the coachman to drive to Goonamuls', the

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fancy shop. He would purchase some silk to make the little Chinese sleeping-coats that she liked.

Darkness had fallen by the time Moung Gyaw reached home. He found his wife seated reading on the verandah, with no trace of the battle that she had fought and gained, save in the pallor of her face and the dark circles beneath her eyes. Her pride was a sure mask, and he lacked a penetrating intelligence. He approached her, however, with a certain timidity, putting a roll of delicate silks into her hand.

"Thank you," she said gravely, laying it aside. Her tone was quite friendly, and he felt distinctly relieved. He had half expected otherwise. He came and sat beside her.

"Would you like a glass of champagne?" he asked.

"I think not," she answered. "But I would like to talk matters over with you—for a few minutes."

Somewhat to her surprise, he replied quite readily:

"Certainly; I am all attention."

"I have thought over everything," she began, somewhat nervously. "I don't want to blame you; even if I did, it is too late. It was a pity that you had not sufficient confidence in me at first, because we all ought to know what we have to face. However, as I say, that is over and done with, and to look back is always unwise."

She paused; but he said nothing—he was busy untying his shoe lace, and his countenance was hidden from her; in any case, its expression was not inspiring.

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"We must only face the future as bravely as we can. No doubt it won't be half as bad as it appears."

Her voice trembled a little. Even with her slight knowledge of the East, economy seemed very ugly.

"I will send Barnett away, as you say her wages are heavy, and we will only drive one horse, and give up all entertaining." She hated the idea, but she did not let it appear so.

He kicked his shoes off, and his brow lowered.

"What you suggest is impossible; people would talk so."

"Then they must talk," she answered him somewhat impatiently. "They can't say anything worse than they have said already, and in any case it's only common honesty to make some effort to pay one's debts. So much even Rangoon would acknowledge."

"Economy with us would only defeat its own object; the clients would fall off; one must impress the native mind," he reiterated.

"But surely not at so great a cost? It isn't what it means now, it's what it spells in the future," she remonstrated.

"Oh! the future will be all right; the old man can't live for ever."

"It's a sorry game, waiting for death."

"Everything in life is a sorry game, when you haven't got enough money," he replied.

"Maybe," she admitted; "but for all that, we cannot go on increasing our liabilities: we must retrench,

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otherwise, where shall we be? I won't have it on my conscience that I had any part in adding to present liabilities."

"Well, we'll let Barnett go," he conceded after a pause; "but *I* cannot drive to office with less than two horses, it's useless to ask me; and in any case I cannot see the use of discussing what is disagreeable."

For a second, as by flashlight, she realised to some degree the sublime selfishness and egotism of this man.

"Very well," she said slowly, after a pause.

Then he opened the evening paper with an air of finality, and she sat on, under the creaking punkah, and thought her tired, sad thoughts.

"They never report my cases," he grumbled fretfully, after a few minutes, "and my judgments are very well worth reading."

She was silent; depressed, lonely, overwrought.

Then suddenly he exclaimed — and he seemed to radiate with self-satisfaction as he did so:

"They've put me at the head of the subscription list, at any rate."

"What subscription list?" asked his wife, roused to some faint interest.

"The Dufferin Hospital Fund," he answered.

"How much did you give?"

"Three hundred rupees."

"Three hundred rupees!" she repeated, turning round in her chair and regarding him with astonishment.

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"You seem surprised," he remarked with some asperity.

"Surprise is not the word, considering our financial circumstances."

"I had to give it; the wife of the Judicial Commissioner came in person," he muttered weakly, in excuse.

His wife was silent; she knew that, to his mind, this argument was final, while, to her, it meant nothing. Nothing!—in any case, what she thought was, perhaps, best not uttered.

At that moment the boy announced dinner.

"I don't think I want any," she said; "I am not well."

"You would be better if you ate," he answered, glancing at her with little interest, preparatory to rising.

"Perhaps," she said, and said no more.

Then he went downstairs. He was so entirely lacking in graceful consideration, or any of those charming acts of courtesy and homage that Englishmen of any status invariably show to women. This, however, she, having led a most secluded girlhood — a girlhood in which not even a brother played a part—hardly missed, though, vaguely, she realised that something was lacking; but how great a something she was only to know when knowledge of a deeper and a wider kind came to her in after years.

She undressed slowly and wearily. Many insects

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buzzed round the lamp as she did so, which did not add to the pleasure of disrobing; then she crept under the mosquito curtain, and lay watching the green lizards on the whitewashed wall, with dim, uncertain gaze.

Something was gone—broken. Was it her youth?

Life seemed so difficult, too; and so full of unexpected threads of pain.

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CHAPTER VI

"WHY don't you become a member of the gymkhana?" asked Captain Reardon of Moung Gyaw one night, when he had just dropped in for a drink before dinner. "Very good value, you know, and some place for Mrs Moung Gyaw to go of an evening. Shall I put your name up?"

"Thanks very much; we shall be very pleased," Moung Gyaw answered, with a certain degree of graciousness.

"You'll enter some ponies, of course, for the next races?" continued his guest, when they had discussed the gymkhana, helping himself to a Havana.

"I don't know," the other answered slowly. "I hadn't thought about it."

"Oh! but you must; that's an awful jolly little pony of yours, 'Cigarette'; it'll beat 'Ah Chains' into a cocked hat; you are a good sportsman—one has only to see you look at a horse to know that; therefore, it behoves you to enter the lists."

Moung Gyaw smiled. If there was one thing in the

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world he was not, nor ever could be, it was a sportsman; therefore he was proportionately pleased and flattered at the impeachment.

His guest rambled on for another twenty minutes or so about the points of the ponies already entered, the rolling of the course, the jockeys, and the prizes.

"If you were to subscribe and support them, they'd be very glad, no doubt, to make you a steward," he said, as he took his departure.

The suggestion simmered in Moung Gyaw's brain, as he dressed for a dinner they were going to at Judge Little's that evening; it seemed a good idea, and would certainly bring him very much to the front. That was all that he ever wanted—to push himself into notice.

The fact that he had no money did not deter him from mentally arranging an imposing racing stable.

"Is Judge Little nice?" asked his wife, as they drove through the warm darkness an hour later.

"He's certainly not nice on the Bench," he said; "he judges all his cases before he hears them, while, outside the court-house, he might possibly shake hands if no one was looking."

"I wonder why he has asked us to dinner?"

"Curiosity; nothing in the world else: and the fact that you know his aunt."

Just then the carriage turned in at the white gates of Judge Little's compound, and their host was seen awaiting them under the coloured Chinese lamp hanging in the entrance.

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The Judge was a man of some forty odd years, with a fatigued sallow face and dull grey eyes, through which no single ray from either heart or soul had ever beamed from within. His gold-rimmed eyeglasses were poised on the end of an unusual nose, and his filbert-shaped nails, highly polished, were as long as if he was going to dig up the bones of his grandfather. Laughter, in Judge Little's presence, would have seemed as much out of place as on a tombstone. As the local wag once said, "Men did not want Little long."

He bestowed two fingers, and a frigid contraction of the facial muscles, on Mrs Moung Gyaw, and one finger and a vague stare on her husband; then he conducted them upstairs into the drawing-room, where there were several people already gathered, in the faint breeze of the punkahs, whose stately swaying seemed to be somehow moulded on their owner's manner. The Judge introduced the newcomers with due solemnity to the three ladies present, beginning with Mrs Trampler, a large dame of small ideas; passing to Mrs Moreton, a delightful Canadian, with a kind disposition and the courage to follow its dictates; and then to Mrs Leverett, a lady of painful slimness, with a face like a mould of lemon-ice, who looked over the bride's head through her long glasses with haughty indifference, acknowledging the introduction by a slight lowering of her eyelids.

Fortunately, the immediate announcement of dinner cut short what promised to be an extremely awkward

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five minutes; the Judge gave his arm to Mrs Leverett, Mr Leverett bringing up the rear with Mrs Moung Gyaw, while sundry unattached males followed behind.

At dinner, Mrs Moung Gyaw found herself exactly opposite Mrs Leverett, who every now and then directed a glance of distinct disapproval over the flower vases. Throughout the meal, which was complicated and cold, her host addressed her only once, his remark taking the shape of an offer of some champagne, one glass of which, he was good enough to say, could not possibly harm her.

Mrs Moung Gyaw, it must be confessed, felt the reverse of happy. When she presented a draft on her partner's conversational bank, it was dishonoured; besides, he had an irritating habit of looking at his wife before replying to any question, however innocent, and then his answers were made with a due regard to monosyllabic economy. Now and then she caught a remark of her husband's, and felt a little throb of relief to think that, at least, she had no reason to be ashamed of him. As a guest he shone far better than as a host; he spoke little, but he spoke well. So things progressed to the end of the repast, and the ladies withdrew to indulge in half-an-hour's moral dissection upstairs.

Mrs Moung Gyaw meekly followed Mrs Trampler's pompous lead on to the large airy verandah overhanging the moon-swept compound, to find herself left severely alone. In fact, for all the notice these women deigned to take of her presence, she might as well have been one of the carved Burmese figures that adorned the inlaid

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cabinet on the landing; until Mrs Moreton, seeing her forlorn condition, broke away from the group and came and sat beside her, prattling gaily and kindly of this and that until Mrs Moung Gyaw was put completely at her ease. A vivid gratitude rose in her towards this one woman—a gratitude, let it be said, as fresh in her memory to-day as on that night, now so many years ago.

The party broke up shortly after ten o'clock, the host being a noted advocate of "early to bed."

At the time of departure, Mrs Moung Gyaw found herself standing beside Mrs Leverett in the hall, when the latter asked with superb condescension, and in much the same tone she would have used to the sweeper:

"And what do you think of Burmah, Mrs—Ah—Hem?"

"As far as I can judge, it seems a land of bores and bungalows," was the other's far from wise answer, and Mrs Moung Gyaw drew about her a lace shawl, of whose value Mrs Leverett made a lightning calculation.

Just then the gharri drove up, and the ladies parted, without another word.

Three days later, Captain Reardon called, at what he was pleased to call "gargle time," just before the dinner-hour, and found Moung Gyaw lounging in a loonygee, with his bare feet on a long chair, eating mangoes with greedy gusto.

"I say, my dear fellow," the guest exclaimed,

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sinking into a deck-chair; "I am awfully sorry, but I'm afraid we shall have to withdraw your name at the gymkhana, or you'll be black-balled; for some reason or other, they are dead against your election."

"All right, it doesn't matter," said the other quickly, feeling intensely annoyed, and devoutly hoping that the news would not reach every one's ears.

"I wish you'd become one of us," pursued the Captain, sipping sherry and bitters; "I mean a Mason," he added, for his hearer's enlightenment. "Very useful, you know."

"No; I don't know anything about it," Moung Gyaw replied, continuing to suck the mangoes with a gurgling sound.

"All the better; just join—they are badly in want of supporters." (Captain Reardon's want of tact was occasionally delicious.) "No chance of black-balling *there*, I'll see to that," he pursued.

"I'll think about it," Moung Gyaw said, with no particular sign of joy.

"Oh! don't think about it," was the cheery retort; "thinking is so fatiguing; just do it."

"Will it cost much?" Moung Gyaw paused to look at his guest, with a mango half-way to his mouth.

"As if you need think of that! Why, I suppose you could buy up half Rangoon, and not feel it!"

Captain Reardon spoke as he and many others believed, and the utter falseness of such an absurd

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supposition stirred and pleased the hearer's ostentatious vanity to the very core.

"I don't know about that," he said, with mock modesty.

"You're like so many rich men," rejoined the gallant Reardon; "afraid to spend—which is, in reality, a wicked throwing-away of opportunity. The world wants spendthrifts, as much as it wants storms; they clear the atmosphere, even while they devastate."

"I'm not so sure," Moung Gyaw responded. "At least, I always try to be economical, if only for my wife's sake."

"Don't! Economy is like a taste for music or painting, it has to be born in you," rejoined the other, adding: "It's sheer affectation on your part to go about in such sorry company. You're much too good a chap."

A faint pleased smile dawned round his host's mouth. Lately he really did begin to feel convinced that he was an uncommonly good fellow, by no means as thoroughly appreciated as he ought to be.

"A smart fellow Reardon," he reflected when the visitor had taken his departure.

That night they were dining out at the house of the Bengali gentleman, the same who had been so accommodating in the matter of loans, before referred to.

"At least we will have to put up with no slights to-night," thought Mrs Moung Gyaw, as she attired herself

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before the cheval glass, and felt in better spirits at the reflection.

The Baboo gentleman, wearing a comprehensive smile and an expansive watch-chain, greeted them with oily cordiality in the porch — a cordiality hardly less distasteful than Judge Little's aloofness.

A subdued tittering from behind some embroidered purdahs informed Mrs Moung Gyaw effectively, as she descended from the gharri, that the dark eyes of several little pledges of Mrs Baboo's affection and endurance were watching her curiously from their hiding-place.

The host offered his arm, and conducted her upstairs, where his wife awaited them.

Mrs Chundera was a little woman, resplendent in pink and silver embroidery, and an extraordinary head-dress, resembling nothing so much as a Scotch bonnet gone wrong.

The room was nerve-shattering, being the most hopeless mixture of true native taste, and the worst form of middle-class English vulgarity.

The greetings once over, the hostess waved her guest to a chair, scanning her carefully the while; her husband, rubbing his clammy hands and rolling his eyes, said, in what he obviously flattered himself was truly European style:

"You will have a drink? Surely you will have a drink?" and without waiting for any reply, darted into an inner room, and reappeared, carrying a small

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and melancholy-looking bottle of claret and three sherry glasses, which he deposited on three woollen mats on the round table, and then proceeded to fill very slowly and carefully.

"You like Rangoon?" said Mrs Chundera, drawing her chair closer to her visitors.

The Bengali lady's conversation, as Mrs Moung Gyaw soon discovered, consisted of assertions put in an interrogative form, some of them the reverse of agreeable.

"I hardly know it yet," was the cautious reply.

"Many English have called on you, is it not?"

"Yes, certainly; I should have been very much surprised if they had not." Mrs Moung Gyaw spoke coldly. The scrutiny of this Indian lady was distasteful, and her manner partook of a familiarity that might in time border dangerously on insolence.

"That is good, very good." Mrs Chundera nodded her head sapiently, and expectorated on to the carpet.

Mrs Moung Gyaw glanced across at her husband, who was conversing in low tones with his host, and wished he would rescue her from what promised to develop into a severe ordeal.

"If you get favour of 'Depooty'-Commissioner and judges, it is good, is it not?"

"I don't know, I am sure. I am very ignorant."

"If knowing judges giving cases in favour to your husband, that is so."

"The Government at home would be glad to know that."

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Mrs Chundera glanced at the speaker quickly. She detected the touch of sarcasm underlying the words, and, like a true native, she resented it deeply.

"I not liking Burmah," she remarked presently, adroitly changing the conversation; "it is a headache and fever country."

"How long have you been here?" asked her guest, trying to appear friendly and interested.

"Ten—five—years," and the little woman held up her plump brown hands to show the number "fifteen."

"What a long time!"

"I going India soon, finding husband for daughter—daughter clever, oh! so; passing Calcutta B.A., getting fine husband, plenty money, is it not?"

"I hope so, I'm sure," murmured her listener politely.

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CHAPTER VII

JUST at that moment dinner was announced by a boy in very soiled white garments, and the host, smiling more widely than ever, advanced towards Mrs Moung Gyaw, and making a circular flourish with his arm, presented it for her acceptance. They descended to the dining-room in a floating atmosphere of attar of roses.

The dining-table stood in the middle of a bare room on a concrete floor, and was adorned with flowers arranged in intricate circles of colour; the tablecloth had seen better days, but the silver was plentiful and good; overhead a punkah creaked painfully in a rusty socket, and made a jarring accompaniment to the conversation. The dinner, of incredible length and wondrous construction, went on its leisurely and tepid way. The host, evidently quite unused to the society of an English lady, devoted himself to Moung Gyaw, and both discussed law, and law, which left Mrs Moung Gyaw at the conversational mercy of her hostess.

"These are silver solid," commenced that lady, after a pause, pointing to the forks.

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"So I see—your things are very handsome," Mrs Moung Gyaw said, doing her best to get through a very hard pie crust that encased a tinned oyster of pale and sickly visage.

"My husband getting these things," continued Mrs Chundera with charming candour; "people what you call pawning, then not taking, is it not?"

Mr Chundera looked decidedly uncomfortable at this announcement, and shifted uneasily on his chair.

"No! no!" he cried, with a peculiar sort of gurgle—words always seemed to gurgle out of his mouth; "I lending, and they not coming." And he smiled all over himself, ending with a fat chuckle of laughter. "That is good joke, is it not?"

"The result is excellent, for you," answered his guest, feeling it incumbent on her to make some reply to her host's appealing glance.

"I getting plenty jewellery so," said Mrs Chundera, with the persistence that was so characteristic of her, at the same time indicating some ornaments that she wore with a round forefinger, that ended in an extraordinarily pink nail.

"My dear," cried her husband, "we must not talk the pisness in the house; that is not the English custom."

Whereupon, his wife smiled the childlike smile that hid so much that was not in any way childlike in her nature, and subsided into silence.

Then the talk drifted to a big ear-boring tamacha that a rich native was to give in the town in the

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following week; after which, dinner being finished, Mrs Moung Gyaw and her hostess retired.

Once upstairs, Mrs Chundera seated herself close to her visitor, and touching her rings, asked:

"Is they real?"

"Yes, certainly; why do you ask?"

"Costing plenty rupees husband giving?" and the little woman's cunning black eyes sought the other's face, as if preferring to trust to her expression rather than her words for an answer.

"No; my mother gave them to me," and Mrs Moung Gyaw's sight grew dim at the memory of that mother, whom she so cruelly missed.

"Your husband giving many things, is it not?"

"He has given me nothing." It was the simple truth, but her listener did not believe her.

"Rangoon saying different," she rejoined, quite unabashed.

"I wish Rangoon would find something else to talk about." Mrs Moung Gyaw spoke with some impatience; she was very warm, and very weary, and her hostess's cross-examination was losing all interest.

There was a short silence, while Mrs Chundera wiped her nose with elaborate ceremony on a handkerchief of astonishing design. Then a happy thought seemed to strike her.

"Monug Oung calling here last evening; he knowing you England, is it not?"

"Yes; I have met Monug Oung," admitted her

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guest, remembering with a mental shudder an odious little native who had been, at least on English soil, a combination of unusual insolence and self-possession, and had criticised everything and everybody, from the House of Lords to a street urchin.

"Monug Oung talking much of you; he saying also you not at all good before you marry."

"Mrs Chundera!" cried her guest, half rising to her feet, "I think you hardly realise what you are saying. Have you asked me here to insult me? It seems as if it were so."

The Bengali lady was alarmed; so, assuming what long after her guest knew to be a hypocritical smile, she said pleadingly:

"I very sorry—I not knowing the English spoke; you not getting plenty angry with me—I sorry."

Whereat her visitor resumed her seat, and supposed that this objectionable little woman was speaking the truth. Just at that moment the boy appeared carrying a tray with biscuits and lemonade. He put the tray down, and salaaming Mrs Moung Gyaw profoundly, disappeared.

"You have got our late butler, I see," she remarked to her hostess.

"Ohyess," admitted that lady, "he saying plenty much about you to me—I knowing everything before seeing."

"How delightful!" exclaimed her guest, reddening with intolerable annoyance.

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"What you say?" asked Mrs Chundera insinuatingly.

"I say that frankness like yours I have never met."

"I always what you English call the frankness; I feeling much pride."

"You have ample reason, I'm sure," answered her visitor, hailing with intense relief the approach of Moung Gyaw and his host. As soon as they appeared, she rose and said abruptly, without any apology:

"I am tired—I wish to go home."

Moung Gyaw looked both surprised and annoyed, but Mr Chundera, with smiling alacrity, shouted from the window, in a tone of joyous relief, far from flattering to a departing guest:

"Gharri! Hi!"

This was at once followed by a sound of carriage wheels.

"Good-night," said Mrs Moung Gyaw coldly.

"You ill?" cried her hostess; "I sorry," and the little woman glanced up with well-simulated concern. "You tired; you carrying little baby, is it not?"

"I think, Mrs Chundera, that you are extremely rude," said her guest, looking down from her great height with dark angry eyes.

Then she passed on down the stairs and out to the carriage, her host, feeling vaguely uncomfortable, following meekly, the radiance of his smile somewhat dimmed.

"You should not have spoken to her like that,"

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exclaimed Moung Gyaw, as the carriage turned out of the gates.

"Why not? She was excessively impertinent the whole evening; I really could not pass over her last remark."

"She knows no better," he said.

"She knows far more than it's good for her to know. She intended to be rude, and she succeeded. Do you imagine for a moment that she would talk to Mrs Trampler or Mrs M'Chatter, or any of them, as she spoke to me to-night? You very well know that she would not. She would be all deference and honeyed words. Why should I be treated differently to them?" Her voice vibrated with barely controlled indignation.

"What is the use of talking like that?" he began irritably; "we must be friends with them."

"I do not see the necessity."

"But it is there."

"Then you can be friendly; I certainly won't."

"But I owe him money, and I cannot pay," he confessed sullenly.

"I am sorry—but I can only promise to be civil, and no more."

"But you must—I say so: to-day only, I borrowed five hundred rupees from Chundera."

"What for?"

"To pay Taik's grocery bill; he was growing nasty, and I had no money."

"And that was Mrs Chundera's way of exacting

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interest, I conclude." She spoke slowly, in wondering scorn.

"She meant no harm," he repeated.

"I know nothing of that," said his wife; "I only know that though I may have to put up with uncalled-for rudeness from the English, I certainly will not from the native of India."

"Damn your spirit!" he cried, and once again he struck her across the mouth. . . . Slowly three great drops of blood started and fell on to the lace berthe of her dress, dyeing it a bright scarlet — the scarlet of shame.

She shrank back into the farthest corner of the victoria; the blow smarted and hurt, but the hurt was more in her mind than her body.

When they reached home, she went to her room, and dismissing Barnett, fastened the door.

She was in the earliest spring-time of her youth, yet old age hardly knows a more chill and hopeless sense of loneliness and desolation than was with her then, as she lay face downward on the bed and thought her youth away.

"I shall insist upon Monug Oung retracting his remark about me," Mrs Moung Gyaw said to her husband, some two days later, *a propos* of what Mrs Chundera had repeated, adding: "I am far from being an advocate of physical retort, but I do wish to heavens you'd dip his fat body in the lake—he'd understand that."

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"That sort of thing is so low," answered Moung Gyaw nervously.

"Low people must be fought with their own weapons."

"You are too easily offended," he deprecated.

"Easily offended!" she echoed. "I think you hardly realise what you are saying. This is a case of my good name; if it is nothing to you, it is all to me." She looked at him with cold, surprised eyes.

"Your name is all right," he grumbled.

"It is not all right when it is assailed by pariahs," she answered. "At the least, if you will not give him a bath, as I suggest, you must compel him to apologise amply to me."

He shifted uneasily.

"I can't quarrel with Oung on your account," he exclaimed at last.

"I don't ask you to quarrel with him—that would imply equality; but, as your wife" (her lip quivered), "my name is in your guardianship. I gave it to you confidently; I do not wish to ever withdraw it, unless you—compel me to." She let her gaze rest earnestly on his face, and in her eyes there dwelt a half-reproachful sadness. She almost prayed that he might not fail her then—it meant to her so much.

"It would be very unwise for me to have any words with Oung. I will admit that he has been very impertinent, but he is, for some unaccountable reason, very high in the favour of the Chief Commissioner, and,

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besides, he knows the old man, and he might complain of me to him—you see what I mean ? "

" I regret that I don't. I am too obtuse."

" You are most unreasonable ! " he burst out. He was dimly conscious that the part he was playing was not a very gallant one, and he generously wished to throw the onus of it on to her.

" I must be most careful not to make enemies," he continued inconsequently ; " I want to get on."

" And to get on you are willing to act the part of a coward. It is a big price ! "

" I am not a coward," he protested ; " you are extremely rude to suggest such a thing. I am simply a man who wishes to go along quietly, and to ignore insults."

" In fact, without being a Christian, you wish to follow the Biblical precept about the smiting on the one cheek, etc."

She felt for him all the superb disdain that a woman, courageous herself, has for a man who is not.

" I shall not stay here to be bullied ! " he exclaimed, and got up and went downstairs to talk to the cook in the cook-house.

She gazed out on the compound with sad, unseeing eyes. Vaguely she felt that in this life some things were going from her that could never be replaced.

The following day they went to a garden-party at Government House—one of those melancholy meetings where lawn-tennis and weak whiskys-and-sodas play

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the most prominent part. Refreshments, on this occasion, were served in the ball-room of the old Government House, and as Mr and Mrs Moung Gyaw entered, they perceived coming towards them the object of their very unpleasant discussion of the day before.

Mr Oung was very short, very stout, and in face uncommonly like an apoplectic bull-frog. He came forward, hand outstretched, and a smile as big as himself.

"At least, you will not speak to him?" she whispered to her husband, when, a second later, she had rejected the dusky outstretched hand, and passed on—to find herself alone. She glanced back over her shoulder; Moung Gyaw was engaged in friendly converse with her enemy.

Her face grew scarlet with intense mortification: some reflex of the rage that consumed her caught her soul also, and drew it out from the silence and reticence with which she strove to subdue it.

For one sudden instant she felt that she could have struck him there where he stood. She looked round and saw, or thought she saw, one or two discreet smiles. A few others had seen this public affront, and were evidently amused.

Her lip trembled; her eyes grew dim—it was not as if it had been a slight arising from unpremeditation or inconsiderate haste; it was calm and deliberate. To have this offence put upon her before so many

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others, by the one person to whom she had given up all her life, all her faith, and all her years to come, was, she felt, quite intolerable and wholly undeserved.

Was this to be a presage of the future? Would he always leave her in a crisis, great or small?

"Come and have a cup of tea with me, Mrs Moung Gyaw," said a cheery voice at her elbow. Mrs Moung Gyaw smiled gratefully down at the speaker—a good-natured, natural little woman, whose acquaintance she had made recently, with only two weaknesses in life—champagne and prickly heat. They strolled towards the buffet together.

In Mrs Sedley's company, Mrs Moung Gyaw lost to a certain extent the first deep feeling of irritation. When the hour came for going home, she had determined to make no allusion to it. There are some things in life that one resents so much that they are best not mentioned. She felt that this was an incident best shut away in her own mind. He would have neither comprehension nor sympathy, and wordy warfares were to be avoided at all costs.

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CHAPTER VIII

ONE evening, a week later, when Mrs Moung Gyaw drove to the office to fetch her husband, he came down the stone steps with hurried tread and radiant glance.

"The old father," he said, "has sent word to buy a house for us to live in. I have Captain Wiseman upstairs with me now—he owns Keighley Street, you know."

"You won't buy Keighley Street, surely?" she exclaimed in dismay. "Why not look round first?"

"Oh, I can't do that; I must take the old man at his word, or he'll probably withdraw the offer."

She was silent. He leant against the carriage door.

"Is it to be bought in your name?" she asked him.

He hesitated. "He suggests the three boys' names as well as mine," he said.

"The three boys!" she repeated. "But they would want to live with us, and there wouldn't be room."

"Exactly what I think," he rejoined.

"Would he not be satisfied with one other name besides yours?" she said.

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"I suppose so." He seemed to be doubtful.

Now, had Mrs Moung Gyaw had any of that greed for gold with which her enemies were so fond of accrediting her, she would have seized the opportunity that presented itself, and said, "Why not mine?" Instead of which, her suggestion was:

"Put in Shway Tha's name." Shway Tha was a younger brother. "He is such a dear, good-natured goose that one ought to look after his interests—the others can shift for themselves."

"I'll see," he said; "one is better than three, certainly." And then there came that crafty look into his eyes that she was growing to know so well.

"What is the price of the bungalow in Keighley Street?" she enquired.

"Twenty-one thousand rupees—it will be a comfort to save one's rent."

"Don't be in too great a hurry. After all, buying a house is like making a partnership, and ought to be carefully considered."

He was silent for a second or so, then said abruptly:

"You had better go driving alone, I shall be late."

Then he directed the coachman where to go, and turned and went back to his office.

"I'm sorry I told her anything about it," was his inward reflection, as he made his way up the dirty steep stairs.

Meanwhile, her ponies bore her swiftly over the red-sanded roads, through the clamour and dust and

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smells of the streets, towards the Lakes. The evening was insufferably warm, and her head ached.

This hot season tired her sorely; besides, life was no longer the simple thing it had once been—it was complicated, difficult, and full of worries and humiliations. Strive how she would, she could not put off from her the sense of loss and of bitterness that came wholly uninvited. Nor did the future appear to her in any of those rare prismatic hues with which youth is so fain to paint it.

The band was playing in Dalhousie Park, when her carriage drew up in line by the water-side.

Nearly all the English were already there courting the breeze, including the Government House party and several portly Indian gentlemen. A few boats drifted lazily on the lake, while the sun sank in blood-red fires behind the great palms on the opposite shore.

Several English women were strolling round the grassy plateau, that is crowned with a summer-house. They varied their proceedings by talking to their friends in the tum-tums or carriages; there was the echo of languid voices and laughter on the air, but no one approached Mrs Moung Gyaw's side. Nothing more friendly was vouchsafed to her than a few unsmiling bows, while the wife of the Chief pretended not to see her. She remained about twenty minutes, gazing with sad, retrospective eyes out over the Lakes, then gave the word to go home.

When she reached the bungalow she found Moung

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Gyaw and Poona Chundera in the drawing-room, the latter seated with her large brass card-tray on his knees, going steadily through the names, and making appropriate remarks as he did so. He seemed in no wise abashed at the advent of Mrs Moung Gyaw, or even aware of her glance of haughty astonishment, for, after tendering a moist handshake, which was ignored, he resumed his seat and his occupation.

"The house is bought," exclaimed her husband, who had not troubled to rise from his reclining position at her entrance.

"Yes, the house is bought," echoed the visitor, softly putting the tray aside; and then, as he rubbed his hands gleefully together, his inward reservation was: "And soon I will have a mortgage on it."

"And now, as I say," continued Mr Chundera, "Moung Gyaw should give many tamachas to the English people. These cards"—his glance travelled towards the tray—"are worth many hundred rupees; several burra-sahibs lie there—that is good, very good." He paused, and glanced first at Moung Gyaw, and then at his wife.

"We cannot afford to entertain, Mr Chundera," she answered, "even if we desired to, and I don't think either of us do. I am afraid," she pursued quietly, "that we must try and find our happiness at home. What do you say?" Her glance went to her husband for confirmation.

"Oh, Chundera is quite right," was his reply.

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Mrs Moung Gyaw sighed. It was useless to depend upon his support, even if only the outward support of mere courtesy.

"Moung Gyaw is so clever," pursued Mr Chundera, "the most clever man in the whole province; there is no one like him: he will be a pucca judge, he will be on Viceroy's counsel, he will be everywhere, if only making powerful friends." The speaker was growing quite enthusiastic, in proof of which, two drops of perspiration glistened on his brow, while the object of his eulogy, who was munching pān, seemed to positively purr with pure pleasure.

Mrs Moung Gyaw was the first to break silence.

"If he is all the things you are kind enough to say, Mr Chundera, then his ability will carry him easily through without the aid of dinners that he would have to incur further debt to pay for." Her tone was very sweet and very chill.

"What matters debt?" cried Mr Chundera recklessly. "My money is his—when his father dying leaving lakhs and lakhs of rupees."

"Chundera is right," interposed Moung Gyaw, his mouth full of the red juice of the pān. There was a brief pause.

Dimly Mrs Moung Gyaw began to realise the far-reaching possibilities of this Bengali's influence on the weakness and instability of her husband.

Poona Chundera's character she read as easily as an open book; she guessed accurately what depths of

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subtlety, mendacity, and falseness lay behind that vacuous smile and assumed geniality of manner.

It was evident that he had already advanced far in Moung Gyaw's confidence—the rest was a matter only for time; but she would fight that growing influence to the uttermost limit of her power. As this thought passed through her mind, her brown eyes met Poona Chundera's yellow ones—possibly, some of the reflex of her meditations found expression therein; for a second their glances met and crossed like steel swords, and from that hour, right on through all the following years to the end, Poona Chundera was her bitter enemy.

Would things have been better for her had they been otherwise? I wonder, I have often wondered, but never touched the solution.

Anyway, the Indian played trumps everywhere and always.

Mrs Moung Gyaw rose, and having mixed some ice sherbet in a glass, said:

"It is late; I will go and dress. Good-night, Mr Chundera," she added distantly; then, passing through the purdah, went to her room, leaving those two together.

For fully half an hour they sat on, conversing, as they always did, in low, confidential tones, scarcely ever, indeed, rising above a whisper; then the Bengali took his leave, and Moung Gyaw joined his wife.

"What can you two find to say to each other?" she asked him, in mild surprise.

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"Chundera teaches me a lot," he answered somewhat moodily. "He has been so many years here, and knows so entirely the procedure at the Bar—he is very useful," he added, more as an afterthought than anything else.

"You do not seem pleased about the house," he remarked a little later.

"Oh yes, I am," his wife rejoined; "in any case, we save a hundred and fifty rupees per month, and that is something. You know," she continued, and her manner was almost persuasive, "we must be careful, and save; the thought of your debts worries me so—we shall never be able to do anything until we are free."

"Oh, there's no use in worrying," he said. Any allusion to his affairs always irritated him.

"But there is every use in worrying," she rejoined; "besides, I see so many shoals ahead."

"I wish to heaven you weren't so d——d pessimistic!" he exclaimed.

"I don't plead guilty to that charge, anyway," she answered lightly; "but I should like to checkmate Mr Chundera's game, for all that."

"What game?" he asked, vaguely suspicious.

"The game of grab."

"I don't follow you—explain."

"Well, he is obviously disappointed of you as a son-in-law, and so is scheming to get you completely under his financial influence. He will go on lending you money, and piling up the interest; he will

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not press for payment; on the contrary, he will prefer you not to pay, so that the amount may go on increasing, and when your father does die, it will be Mr Chundera who will be entitled to your share."

"Absurd!" he retorted. "You are prejudiced; he is a very good fellow."

"I am not at all prejudiced. As to his goodness, I am afraid it exists in your imagination; only, I beg of you, for both our sakes, not to increase your debt to him, or you'll bitterly repent it."

"I wish you wouldn't interfere," he cried; "in any case, the debts are mine, not yours."

"However, there is evidently little use in discussing the gentleman. Possibly we both take extreme views, and there is little wisdom in extremes; let us talk of something else—for instance, am I, or am I not, to call at Government House?"

"Oh, certainly you must—every one does; it's only common respect."

"Very well then, that's settled; and now to revert for one moment to household affairs. Don't you think it would be far better if we went on the ready-money system? The total of the monthly accounts is always so appalling, while the small sums are not so missed." She looked at him anxiously as she spoke.

"We will see," he answered, in that procrastinating way of his that his wife was getting to fear so.

"It is a great pity," he added, "that you have not

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got some money of your own, then you could contribute towards the house." His tone was of one who had been defrauded of something justly his right. She flushed; he had voiced what to her was becoming an hourly regret.

"You knew that I was without any income when you married me," she said; "at least *you* were not deceived over money." She could not help the little sneer that crept into the words.

"At any rate, you have your rings," he exclaimed, "and if we want money at any time——"

"Oh no!" she interrupted hastily. "My mother gave me those, and unless—unless we were in really dire straits, brought about by no fault of yours or mine, I could never consent——" She broke off abruptly.

"Oh, you needn't be so alarmed—I'd rather be beholden to Chundera any day than to you"; and then he rose from the chair on which he was sitting, and left her.

"Are you going to indulge me in my request of yesterday?" she asked, as they started for their drive in the cool of the following morning.

"What? About the housekeeping?" he said, lightly touching the ponies with his whip.

"Yes; we shall be so much better off, you know."

"I doubt it; in fact, I don't believe in it."

"Give it a trial, anyhow," she entreated.

"As you like. How much will you want?"

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"If you give me three hundred and eighty-two rupees, I will pay everything except the horses' food, and shall hope to have a little balance in hand at the end of every month."

"Very well," he conceded. "I'll bring the money home to-night."

Then they talked of other matters, and for the first time for many weeks she felt almost light-hearted. After all, how absurd it was to be cast down, she told herself; things would inevitably come right; it was only a matter for Time, the great adjuster.

The ponies bore them swiftly through the misty coolness of the early day. He drove well; and, moreover, was in high good-humour. He conversed cheerfully as they went. She gave herself up to the pleasure of the moment; when he so willed it, he could be very agreeable and interesting, the only thing lacking in his conversation being the entire absence of any appreciation of any form of humour.

When they turned the ponies' heads homewards, after a drive that had extended as far as Kokine, they passed through the Cantonment Gardens. Animated groups of Burmese people, shoes in hand, were strolling all in the direction of the Pagoda; it was evidently some Buddhist festival day.

Mrs Moung Gyaw's eye was arrested by the appearance of one Burmese girl in particular, who was of an unusual height and order of looks, and wore a very rich tamein, while her hair, black as night, fell to her feet.

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"What a very handsome girl!" she exclaimed.

Involuntarily, his glance went towards the girl, who looked up. Their eyes met; the girl smiled with gay familiarity, so did he.

"Who is she?" asked his wife, vaguely displeased.

"Oh! a girl I knew in the town," he answered carelessly, and drew his whip, still smiling, caressingly over the ponies' backs.

Her brow contracted; she was young enough to feel jealous of the past.

The rest of the drive was passed in silence; for her the beauty of the morning was clouded.

It was a curious and a melancholy fact that, whenever she was just beginning to feel a little contented, invariably some jarring note sounded to mar the harmony of the moment, and this became more noticeable as time flew by. It was disconcerting, and looked as if Fate was against her, even in the smallest things.

When he returned from office that evening, he brought fifty rupees in his cash-box.

"That's all the cash I've got," he said in explanation. "Will you go on with that for the present?"

"Yes, certainly," she assented, and took the money and locked it away.

The next morning she said to the boy when he brought his list: "Go to ——" (naming the shop where they dealt) "and pay for these things."

Three hours later he returned, bringing her a letter, which, on being opened, ran as follows:—

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"MADAM,—We shall be very pleased to place your esteemed custom on a cash basis, but before doing so, we would respectfully point out to you that it would be desirable to have the old accounts paid, the first of which dates back five months since; for three months we have received no money from Mr Moung Gyaw, and when our peon went last week to the office, the head clerk kicked him into the street.

"If you would be so good as to draw Mr Moung Gyaw's kind attention to our long-standing account, we should feel greatly obliged.—We are, Madam, your obedient servants, S—— & Co."

This was not a good beginning, certainly—more especially as she doubted his ability, quite as much as his willingness, to clear off the total, or even part. It seemed rather idle to think of starting a new system before the old debts were paid.

"Please, mem—mali wanting wages." It was the ayah's whining voice that broke in on her meditations.

"Send the mali here," she commanded; and in a few minutes a lean figure in a loin cloth and a kharki coat sidled apologetically up the stairs and into her presence, followed closely by the boy.

"What date is his pay due?" she enquired of the latter.

"The twelfth of the month," was the reply.

"Very well, he can have half his wages for this month," said his mistress, unlocking the drawer.

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"Begging memsahib's pardon, but mali not getting wages two months come last month—sahib always promising, not giving." The boy spoke as if in pained apology for his master's lapse of memory.

"Very well," she replied, "I will see to it—I will speak to master; meanwhile, let him have six rupees." She put the money on the table, whereupon the mali salaamed gratefully and withdrew.

The news that wages were available disseminated rapidly, and the staff, one after another, presented themselves, and all told pretty much the same tale—pay long overdue—master promising—giving little, then forgetting. Her small reserve was very soon considerably diminished, though the claims were by no means satisfied. When they had all withdrawn, she went and lay down under the punkah. It was just the time of the chota bursat, and the heat was intolerable. Her head felt like a lump of hot lead, while the mosquitoes never left her. "And it's spring in England now," she thought, quoting unconsciously.

She felt tired and lonely. She was worried, too, with the worst of all worries—a money one. She wondered if all his accounts were in the same arrears, and how it was that his affairs had come to be so muddled?

What a pity it was that he had not been open about financial affairs! What a pity! And even now—now when she was gradually getting to know things—she never could extract a definite statement from him of

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how much he owed, or of the interest he was paying. He had acknowledged that he kept no books, not even in the office, and that the only person who knew to within a small amount of how he really stood, was his Burman clerk. It made the present very difficult, and the prospects more than disheartening.

Presently she fell into a little sleep. When she woke, it was time to dress for the coming drive.

When he returned, she showed him the letter from the Jewish grocers. He frowned as he read it.

"It's like their d——d impudence," he observed; "I hate people who ask for money."

"Now, look here," she said, and she went and sat near him; "do let us face matters as they are, and try and straighten them out. Let us get out of debt, and keep out of it."

"For heaven's sake, don't start preaching again!' he cried. "I know my own business best. We can neither get out of debt, nor keep out of it, and I, for one, am not going to try. In any case, as I've said before, the debts are mine, and not yours. When I get a judicial appointment, I'll settle my bills. Meanwhile, I shall continue to go as I'm going. We'll leave these people," he continued, throwing the letter down, "and go back and deal with the Chinaman. And now let's have a glass of champagne," and he shouted for the boy.

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CHAPTER IX

Two months passed by. Day after day the rain fell with noisy, melancholy persistence, varied by thunderstorms of a terrific violence; and the depression engendered by that endless falling water is not to be put into words.

Evening after evening, for the first part of the monsoon, a drive was not possible; and then, when darkness fell, with it came swarms of white ants and other things, that invaded the house and whirred round the lamps with tormenting persistence. Moung Gyaw and his wife, at this time, had almost given up entertaining, and no longer accepted any stray invitations that came their way.

Nor was this in any way extraordinary. At the few hunt finishes and one ball at which, latterly, they had been present, the feeling of Rangoon was so evident as to be entirely unmistakable. The cold civilities of a few—a very few—made the palpable aversion of the majority stand out in even stronger relief. It was then that Mrs Moung Gyaw learnt that there is a way of being

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spoken to that is far more insulting than silence; while, at the one bazaar at which she had assisted, the scanty circle that gathered round was made up of courtiers of whom no woman need have been proud—a few beardless subalterns, too young to be seriously compromised by any social folly; two or three chokeras out of some commercial house; and one or two legal men, who did not mind sacrificing their dingy dignity to the possibility of a decent dinner and a generous allowance of drinkable champagne.

The ladies, one and all, held rigorously aloof. It is a sad sight to see a woman put wholly or partially under the social ban, especially when there is no proven guilt against her; pitiful exceedingly to watch the victim as she rears her white brow against her tormentors, striving to betray no sign, not even by the quiver of lip or eyelid, while the small silent shafts strike home; to note the eager momentary lighting-up of her face as some recent and possibly friendly acquaintance draws near, the blank disappointment so hard to conceal as the prudent gentleman passes by; most pitiful of all, to such as care for women, the scarcely concealed exultation of certain skilful archeresses, who, safe behind the rampart of their own unassailability, smite and spare not.

Mrs Moung Gyaw lacked the courage to face any more such ordeals; she had failed hitherto to make any friends, and hardly dared to hope for any better luck in the future. The marriage was a barrier that

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nothing could break down, and no act of hers or his would ever make the outside world condone, much less forgive. So much was entirely certain. Realising this beyond the possibility of a doubt, Mrs Moung Gyaw, greatly to her husband's chagrin and openly expressed annoyance, refused obstinately to seek any further social suffrage at the hands of the Rangoon world. So women dropped from out of her existence, though a few men continued to visit and occasionally to dine. In Rangoon, as in other places, there is always a floating population ready to go anywhere with any one.

Moung Gyaw, whose vanity, happily for him, never played truant, attributed the attentions of these stragglers entirely to his personal charms, and the desertion of the many to jealousy—jealousy of whom, or what, he would, no doubt, have found it difficult to say.

His wife, on the other hand, had no such illusions; perhaps the highest quality in her own temperament had always been the frankness with which she accepted truths which were unwelcome to her; while her insight into the minds of others told her to a nicety exactly their attitude (even when concealed) towards her and hers. Not a whit of their prejudice and arrogance escaped her, and while she in no way blamed them, except for the ill-breeding that allows of open slights, she avoided any possibility of contact from that time onwards.

Cut off from all companionship, her existence narrowed

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itself severely; nevertheless, she gathered up the few threads that remained with, at least, outward cheerfulness. She was well aware that the chains that were fastened about her life could never be severed except by death. Such as her existence was now, so she had to continue it. She trusted that in time she might hope to shape her life into some resemblance to her dreams. So she turned to books, and trusted to time.

Her education had been of a very perfunctory kind, and she hailed the present opportunity for study with pleasure. The range that she covered in those days was a very wide and varied one. Travel, biography, poems, memoirs, all gave some added knowledge, some deeper sympathy, some wider comprehension. Nevertheless, even books cannot altogether fill a woman's life; there are other wants and aspirations.

Destiny, at this time, held in reserve for her many a lesson not set down in the most exhaustive of works —lessons, the rudiments of which it would take long months for her to master. As it was, strive as she would, as the endless weeks of the long rains crept on, devoid of change or stimulus, a fearful desolation of the senses would sweep over her, an unutterable impatience and sickness would consume her. How could she ever endure the years that stretched out? That was the question that gradually began to beat at her heart with horrible persistence.

Gradually it began to haunt her; sleeping and waking,

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in the long nights, when rest had fled before the awful heat, the one thought was the shrinking dread of those years.

Completely she began to realise how a wife must needs love a husband, to accept such exile at his hands.

Did she so love ?

She passed rapidly by the question ; she did not care for self-communion of late. It seemed a disloyalty.

Of Moung Gyaw she saw but little. It was nearing the end of his officiating appointment ; there was so much to be done ; piles of papers to be assorted, arrears of cases that must be cleared, before the pucca judge returned from leave.

Of their monetary affairs she was in entire ignorance. She only knew that they alternated between unnecessary expenditure in anything appertaining to the stable, and unspeakable meannesses in other ways. Moung Gyaw, having reduced the bazaar money to the lowest possible limit, endeavoured to sell eggs from some hens that he kept to the cook, with the idea of further reduction—an arrangement that the bawarchi indignantly repudiated ; while his wife never had even enough money to cover postage to England in her possession, and she feared to add in any way to their debts by buying anything at the shops in the town. No one, indeed, could have been more rigidly economical than she was, as a matter of conscience ; nor, had she tried, could she have made a bigger mistake in dealing with such a man as Moung Gyaw. This she realised

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long afterwards, when it was too late. No arrangement could have suited him better; there were few things he admired more than self-denial in others. The more his wife was willing to go without, the more he expected her to, and in this, as in other ways, they hourly drifted more apart.

He contrived to be less and less in the bungalow, and, when they dined alone, he invariably went sound asleep immediately afterwards, leaving her to get through the evening, as through the day, in the best way she could. The times when he drove with her grew rarer and wider apart; he seldom talked to her, and never, by any chance, confided in her. Fortunately, her temperament led her to a love of solitude and meditation, otherwise the life would have been more aggressively desolate than it was. Nevertheless, there were times when her very soul seemed to brim over with rebellion at this bereft and confined existence.

Throughout the rains, she found the heat was so moist, so clinging and all-pervading, as to be well-nigh unbearable. All her pretty picture-frames had departed this life; her books and clothes were damp to the touch and covered with mould, the photos rapidly faded from view, the silk in the lamp shades came asunder at the least touch, the flowers in her hats had dissolved into pulp, her toilet oatmeal became a mass of moving white maggots; ants infested every place, and a cobra curled itself up on the verandah, whilst the presence of frogs in the bath-room was a daily occurrence.

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Nothing could have been more monotonous or trying than those long gloomy days, and then the evenings, when all kinds of insects buzz round the lamps, flop on the floor, or stick in one's hair, making dinner a lingering martyrdom, and sitting to read afterwards an impossibility. These nights, coming on days absolutely devoid of stimulus or hope, not infrequently made her feel weak to tears.

As to Moung Gyaw, he never even felt the heat; the mosquitoes left him severely alone, and as to the rest of the insect world, he appeared to enjoy their company rather than otherwise.

"Why did you not prepare me?" she asked him one evening, when they had been driven from the dinner-table before an invasion of white ants.

"Everybody has to find these things out for himself," was his answer. "Of course, very few women make such an absurd fuss as you do about a few beetles," he added.

"I suppose you wish to imply that a dislike to, say, flying bugs, for instance, is a peculiarity of mine?"

"Oh, I wouldn't go as far as that," he said graciously.

"No doubt, I shall get used to them; perhaps even, in time, get to like them," she remarked a little later, and honestly hoped that she would for her own sake.

Towards the end of September Mrs Moung Gyaw fell ill with a bad attack of fever; and what a hopeless place Rangoon is to be ill in! It was during those weeks that a more intimate realisation of the limitless

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loneliness of her existence came to her, as she lay in bed with no one to speak to, day after day.

It is true that the doctor came every morning, and having refreshed himself with a generous peg of whisky and ginger ale, nodded his head sapiently, murmured something about phenacetin, and departed.

Moung Gyaw looked in for ten minutes on his return from office, and then went for a drive, while the ayah squatted, darning endless stockings, on the verandah.

When she was well again, the doctor advised a change.

"You want bracing," he said.

Truly she did want bracing, but it was not of a kind that comes on the finest breeze from heaven.

"We can't go away now; there's no money," observed Moung Gyaw, when she ventured to suggest it, as the Courts were to close for the holidays shortly.

"We'll go to Akyab for Christmas," he went on; "that is, if I can squeeze some money out of the old man to pay our fares."

Shortly afterwards he drove home one day in a new gharri, drawn by a new horse.

"I bought it very cheap," he explained, in answer to her look; "and the mare is a very good one, and her foal, M'Taggart, the vet., tells me, will in all probability make a racing pony."

Mrs Moung Gyaw looked at the horse, and, even to her untutored eye, it seemed more like a cow than anything else. It was with some difficulty that she repressed a desire to laugh.

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"What did you give for it?" she enquired, as he stood gazing admiringly at its fat sides.

"Only seven hundred rupees," he replied promptly, in the tone of a person who had been fortunate enough to make a surprising bargain.

"Did M'Taggart sell it to you?"

"Yes," he replied quickly.

"Ah!" she murmured, and drew a comprehensive breath, adding, as she did so: "Who paid for it?"

"Why do you always ask indiscreet questions?" he said, with annoyance. "What does it matter who paid?"

"What indeed!" his wife replied.

And he followed the syce round to the stables to superintend the new horse's quarters.

She sighed as she watched him go. It seemed so absurd adding these fresh and unnecessary expenses, when they were already so burdened. It was useless to talk to him; she knew from experience that nothing made things so disagreeable between them as to offer him any advice that did not fall in with his own ideas, either on the subject of money or any other.

She was beginning to lack the courage to face unpleasantness.

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CHAPTER X

Of her husband, personally, Mrs Moung Gyaw gradually seemed to see less and less as the weeks followed on. He drove out usually alone, or spent the time before dinner in the society of Mr and Mrs Chundera; besides, he went a good deal into the district, on cases; on which occasions, Mrs Moung Gyaw took her drives abroad invariably alone, coming back to a solitary dinner.

As to how his wife got through the hours he never enquired, nor did he ever pause to consider whether the life was all that even the most easily contented of women might reasonably have demanded. As she did not complain, he concluded that all must be well.

"I don't think you care very much for me," she said somewhat wistfully, as they sat together one evening in December.

"Why should you doubt it?" he asked.

"Oh! many things. For instance, you so seldom speak to me, you take every chance of going elsewhere, and although you know I hate to see you with bare

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feet and Burmese loongyee at dinner, yet you invariably wear it."

"It's much cooler," he said.

"But you don't feel the heat," she observed.

"Well, then, it's more comfortable—I think you are unreasonable to expect me to dress for dinner."

"I hope not," she replied gravely; "I always dislike unreasonable people intensely. But it appears very disrespectful before the servants to walk and lounge about so scantily clothed."

"Oh, d——n the servants!" he cried.

"They talk, you know, and you're so sensitive to outside opinion," she ventured to explain.

"Let them talk! What can they say? except that the marriage between East and West is a failure, and they'll be precious near the truth too." With which courteous speech he left her.

"A failure!" Was that true?

Did he really think so? Did she also? But no! things would have to be far worse than they were before her pride would break sufficiently for her to acknowledge that the path she had essayed to tread had such a turnpike as that. Never should the outside world triumph to that extent. There are some things one cannot—one had, at least, best not—think about, even to oneself.

It was, of course, only a hasty expression of his. He could not have meant it, so she tried to think, and, in so doing, began that long series of mistakes of which

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an entirely misconceived notion of life was the well-spring—one that was destined to cost her dear, very dear, long before all was said and done. Nevertheless, of all the things that had galled her so keenly in this new life, none had struck so near home as those two words, "A failure!"

From that day forward, it seemed to her as if existence grew more difficult. Almost she began to think that, from his point of view, he had spoken the truth.

At any rate, he grew rapidly more indifferent, and in many ways more actively unkind, than he had ever been before—his attitude, indeed, became unmistakable—and never had her life in Rangoon seemed so gloomy. The fiction that, in spite of all, she had loved to maintain about his affection for her, being rapidly withdrawn, the full intensity of her loneliness began to stand out before her all at once.

At first, it seemed almost impossible, as it so often does to youth, that Destiny should have so decreed that she and sorrow should keep house together, no more than she knew that there was a vitality and force in her destined to carry her through, where weaker natures would have early given way and failed. Tears, bitter tears, rose to her eyes. She was scarcely more than a girl—even, indeed, a child in many ways and things, with a heart half-bruised and broken.

She had great longings, and many, many regrets, and was all alone in a world which, to her full of doubts and desires, seemed then as the road to the shot doe,

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when many a weary mile stretches between it and the herd.

"You are tired of me," she said to him a long time later.

"One would tire of an angel if they were always with us," he answered.

"I am a long way off being an angel," she replied, and smiled faintly.

There was a pause; then he commenced hesitatingly:

"If you would not mind—that is, if you would not make a fuss—I should like—I mean that I could make arrangements" (he corrected himself hastily) "to visit a girl in the town. I should not care for her, of course, but variety is so needful for a man."

She stared at him in amazement; she doubted that she had heard aright.

"You need not look surprised," he added. "It is a very ordinary proposition."

"Very ordinary?" she cried blankly; "very ordinary for a man, married not a year, to want to seek a girl of the town in order to better appreciate, or depreciate, his wife?" The words came slowly, one by one,

"Most ordinary with any married man," he said emphatically. "No man is ever faithful to his wife."

Her heart rose with a throb of indignation, then sank within her.

Was it conceivable that he spoke the truth? Was

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this yet another glimpse of life—life as it was, not as women wished it? Was one, indeed, for ever powerless to hold a man's affection? What more was there left to learn? Was it indeed possible that this was so, or was it only his own sentiment?

All men surely——? She went back mentally; even in her short experience she had met a few couples unquestionably devoted to each other.

Then she looked at him. He had gone back to the reading of a law-book, and was busy marking passages with a blue pencil. He lay in a long chair, and his legs, lean and bare to the knee, were shaking rapidly to and fro in a maddening habit that his wife always thought had been copied from Chundera, who invariably shook in the lower limbs tremulously, like a badly-set human jelly.

"I hope you are not offended," he exclaimed, after a long silence, putting aside his book and yawning.

"Oh no; I am not offended," she echoed dully. "Your views of life are rather astounding, that's all."

"They are pretty accurate, nevertheless," he said sententiously. "I am a man of the world, whereas you——"

"Oh! I suspect I am much nearer being a fool than anything else," she interrupted. "At least, my opinion of myself, in the light of your wisdom, is becoming quite normal, which is something to be thankful for."

He frowned slightly. He was not quite sure whether she intended to be sarcastic or not—which was annoying

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But no more on the subject passed between them. His words had only swept away another landmark, that was all. How much such landmarks mean to a woman, he of all men was least fit to measure.

Early in November, when the weather was growing a little cooler, Moung Gyaw was engaged to go up to Myin Gyau, a God-forsaken spot in Upper Burmah, on behalf of some Mahommedan mill-owners, who had a dispute with a Burman over a right-of-way.

"You had better come," he said to his wife; "the change will do you good, and you will see a bit of the country. The clients will put us up, and it's sure to be a decent bungalow, and no expense to us."

So it was arranged.

They left Rangoon, accompanied by the boy and a junior clerk from the office, in the evening, and arrived at Myin Gyau after a long and wearisome journey lasting over twenty-two hours.

Myin Gyau itself consisted of a long and straggling village, with a mixed population, and was surrounded on one side by a picturesque range of purple mountains, and on the other by a vast expanse of green, swaying, sun-striped paddy lands, and many small gold pagodas, yellow against the sky-line, interspersed with one or two sombre kyonugs, looking like patches of brown embroidered velvet on emerald.

The Mahommedan clients, two austere young men in black, met them on their arrival, and conducted them with much ceremony to a small crazy-looking

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brougham, drawn by a careworn and misanthropic-looking pony harnessed with stout ropes, driven by a coachman in tennis blazer, and nothing else, while a syce, whose costume was composed of about half a yard of muslin that had once long ago been white, and a scarlet coat, evidently the one-time property of an English soldier, which gave him an appearance of an elderly monkey, clung on behind.

The Mahommedan gentlemen salaamed profoundly when their guests were seated, but did not think it in any way necessary to apologise because each of the occupants of the vehicle would be compelled throughout the drive to hold the doors to prevent them from flying open.

"Why do they have a syce, when he is as useless as this one?" asked Mrs Moung Gyaw, glancing through a large crack in the back of the carriage at the miserable creature who balanced himself with such evident difficulty on a rusty bar, as they went at an alarmingly reckless pace down the narrow road.

"I don't know, I am sure," answered her husband, "unless it's to make more smell."

A drive of about a mile, in the course of which they scattered ducks, hens, and pariah dogs with painful haste to right and left, and raised clouds of dust, brought them to their destination—a square enclosed kind of yard, in which stood two mills, a long low stone building evidently a dwelling-house, and a square structure of dhunni, that stood somewhat back and was built

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in the shape of a bungalow. This they found to be the guest-house. The two Mahommedan gentlemen had already arrived, and were ready to conduct them to it. The house, for such it was intended to be, had one large living-room, containing a dining-table and two chairs—one with only three legs—and an earth floor. Out of that was a bed-chamber, with two single beds and a dressing-table; three barred openings served as windows, at which already several curious brown faces were gathered; while the pump in the jungly compound at the back, the host explained, took the place of bath-room and washing-stand.

Mrs Moung Gyaw sat on the edge of the bed while the coolies brought the luggage in, and wondered idly if the colour and age of the sheets could be safely taken as any indication of how many visitors had slept in them.

"Not very luxurious," remarked Moung Gyaw, when the door closed and they were alone.

"Not exactly the Savoy Hotel," she rejoined, looking round.

"I want to win the case for them," he pursued presently; "if I do, I expect they will make you a present."

"I should doubt it," she said, shaking her head.

"Why?" he enquired, surprised.

"I don't know, but I should; besides, if they have paid you well, I consider it wholly unnecessary that they should," she answered, rising and going towards the window to look out.

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"Who's the case to be heard by—the D.C. or a myook?" she asked after awhile, having ascertained that the view was hopelessly flat and uninteresting.

"Oh, a myook, and, as it happens, an Arakanese."

"You know him?"

"Oh yes; Monug Pay is his name; terrible fellow for taking bribes, so they say."

"Are you going to offer him an old coat or anything?" she exclaimed, laughing a little.

"Certainly not," he said. "What put such an idea into your head?" It always amused her to see how righteous became his tone under any such suggestions.

"Oh, only because one likes to assist justice when one can."

"We'll drive up and see him, though," he said, after a few minutes; "it might help matters." Whereupon she bent her head to conceal her expression, which was one of complete amusement.

"Of course we'll go and see him," she cried, "if that carriage will hold together long enough to take us."

It was almost dark when the conveyance made its reappearance, and they drove off in the direction of the village. The Myook's hut, for it was really hardly more, stood raised on piles, somewhat back from the road, and in no way differed from its neighbours, in spite of housing so superior a being as Monug Pay. In response to the syce's announcement, that gentleman himself condescended to appear, lantern in hand, at the top of the wooden ladder-like staircase.

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"Come up, Mr Moung Gyaw," he cried in English, and then perceiving that his guest was not alone, he came clattering down, his hand held out in greeting. Monug Pay prided himself on being conversant with English customs.

When Mrs Moung Gyaw had alighted, he led the way up into a room above, in which were some chairs and a table spread with a coarse cloth, an oil lamp of resplendent design that diffused an odour the reverse of alluring around; on a piece of rope, spread across from corner to corner, some loonygees were drying, while two naked children played silently in a corner where the light did not penetrate.

There was, of course, no punkah, and the heat was intense. All these things Mrs Moung Gyaw took in at a glance, then brought her eyes to bear upon her host as he motioned her to a seat. She thought she had never seen any man so small and so pompous before. He wore a pink loonygee, ample and rustling, a white jacket with gold buttons, a wonderful goung boung of Arakanese design, silk socks, and patent leather shoes, together with a huge diamond ring, while his whole dusky, self-important body seemed to form a pendant to a colossal cheroot that was stuck in the corner of his coarse, thick-lipped mouth. His welcome was quite effusive, strangely blended with a distinct air of patronage, which proved intensely amusing.

In a very few seconds his wife made her appearance from behind a faded purdah. She was a dainty-looking

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lady of thirty, or thereabouts, magnificently attired also in pink, and wearing many diamonds; indeed, her nadoungs appeared like great lumps of light in the surrounding gloom. The incongruity of their clothes with their surroundings did not seem to strike either Mr or Mrs Monug Pay.

The latter spoke no English, contenting herself with the expression of her pleasure at receiving Mrs Moung Gyaw, which Monug Pay translated into elaborate English. Whereat the guest bowed and smiled across the table, and tried to appear pleasant and friendly, trusting that she would not be detected in the ungraceful act of wiping her face and forehead.

Moung Gyaw and Monug Pay fell to conversing in Arakanese, a language so harsh and guttural as to make the words seem all but blows; while Mrs Moung Gyaw and her hostess continued to smile at each other in silence—a proceeding which was commencing to get seriously on Mrs Moung Gyaw's nerves, when suddenly Monug Pay called out in peremptory tones an unpronounceable name, in answer to which a very young and plain-looking girl sidled shyly into the room, and with a timid gesture proffered a few cheroots on a tray for Moung Gyaw's acceptance, while her glance went earnestly and enquiringly in Mrs Moung Gyaw's direction. Then, at a sign from her father, she retired as quickly as she had come, without having uttered a word. Shortly afterwards Moung Gyaw, in response to his wife's telegraphic suggestion, rose, and they made their

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adieux, Mr Monug Pay insisting upon re-escorting them down the creaking steps. As the gharri drove off, he stood just in the faint rays of the lamp, his pasoh tucked carefully up out of the mud, thereby displaying a pair of sturdy tattooed calves, from which his socks obligingly fell away.

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CHAPTER XI

"WHAT an extraordinary little man!" Mrs Moung Gyaw observed in an amused tone of voice, leaning forward in the hopes of catching any wandering air.

"Do you know why he called his daughter to come in just now?" Moung Gyaw said, not heeding her remark.

"No; did it signify anything in special?"

"Oh yes; he is very anxious to marry her to one of my brothers, and that was in order that we might see her and judge of her merits. That was what he was talking about."

"He didn't waste much time, anyway," she replied.

"No; he is an energetic little chap," her husband answered quite seriously.

Then they continued the rest of their drive in silence, both being fully occupied in trying to maintain their balance, as the coachman dashed round dark corners with that recklessness and daring that may be permissible in Ireland, but which is dangerous and unnecessary elsewhere.

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They had not been in the bungalow above twenty minutes, when the durwan came to the door and announced that Monug Pay was at the gate, and asked if they received.

"He has come to return our call," Moung Gyaw explained to his wife, who was not too pleased at the prospect of such a surfeit of Monug Pay's society.

"I suppose we must see him?" she asked, emerging from her room into the light of the lamp. She looked tired, and she felt far more so.

"I am afraid so," he assented gloomily, and he gave the word to the waiting watchman.

In a very few moments, Monug Pay, followed by his wife, entered. The boy produced two extra chairs, and brought whisky and lemonade and glasses.

The guests seated themselves laboriously, while Monug Pay graciously intimated his willingness to drink a whisky-and-soda. Then he glanced round, asked some searching questions of Moung Gyaw anent his clients, opined that they were quite wrong in the issue that they were raising, and added that they were extremely unpopular, both with the Chinese and Burmese community, in Myin Gyau. Moung Gyaw rubbed his spectacles, nodded his head, and ventured no opinion, an omission which did not trouble his guest, who loved no man's company, or voice, as well as his own.

Tilting his chair back, and crossing one foot over the other, a sign of feeling considerably more at home than was desirable, the blatant little creature proceeded to

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give them his views on divers subjects, including the "Depooty"-Commissioner, who had evidently been unfortunate enough to incur his grave displeasure. Turning to Mrs Moung Gyaw, Monug Pay gravely informed her with much emphasis that it was nothing but jealousy of the most virulent kind on the part of the Government that consigned him and his legal acumen to such a remote part of the world as Myin Gyau.

"Jealousy is the cause of much injustice," Mrs Moung Gyaw remarked feelingly, perceiving that he looked eagerly for some expression of opinion or explanation at her hands.

"You say right," he exclaimed; "you say right." Then, abruptly changing the conversation, he turned to Moung Gyaw, who was beginning to nod sleepily in his chair, and asked abruptly:

"Have you given your consideration to what we spoke of just now?"

"About the marriage, you mean?"

"Yuss. It would be well to settle with little delay; my daughter is now just thirteen years," and he slowly swallowed the last of his whisky-and-soda.

"I shall do my best with my brothers," Moung Gyaw answered.

"And Mrs Moung Gyaw, will she also give her much-valued help?" He looked with a supplicating smile in her direction.

"I am very sorry, but I fear not; it's too great a responsibility," she replied.

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"My wife does not understand," Moung Gyaw hastily interposed, adding: "Which of my young brothers would you like? Shwê Ban is in the Government service, while Tha Zan, as you know, is the youngest of the family."

Monug Pay paused. His eyes glistened.

"You are very kind," he said at last. "The Government service is very good, but, if Tha Zan is the youngest, he would be best, because he will get the biggest share of your father's money."

There was evidently no false dignity about Monug Pay when he went a-courting.

Mrs Moung Gyaw's gravity was somewhat tried.

As to Mrs Monug Pay, she had been watching her husband, since they arrived, with absorbed gaze, evidently trying to judge what he was saying by his gestures or expressions, the result being apparently satisfactory.

"If that is so," Moung Gyaw said, "I will do everything in my power; I don't fancy that Tha Zan will refuse," he added confidently. Then they looked at each other, and seemed to regard the affair as settled; after which, Monug Pay showed signs of his approaching departure. He got out of his chair with some difficulty.

"There is a big pwè to-night," he announced. "My wife and many others are going. If you and Mrs Moung Gyaw would honour us, we should be very happy; I could send my gharri for you."

Moung Gyaw glanced at his wife interrogatively.

"I fear not; thank you very much; I am very

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tired," and she held out her hand and placed it in Monug Pay's warm, damp clasp.

" I shall be glad to go," Moung Gyaw said. He was not pleased at her refusal.

Then he shouted for the durwan to come, and they all walked down to the gate to where Monug Pay's carriage waited.

" I hope you won't lengthen that case out to-morrow," Moung Gyaw said at parting, " because I want to leave by the afternoon train."

" No fear," cried the other jocularly. " Your brother marries my daughter, I do everything for you to-morrow," and the little man's teeth and eyes gleamed back at them like a Bengal tiger's through the night.

" The case is as good as won," Moung Gyaw remarked, as they followed the durwan's lamp back up the path ; " it's a mere matter of form to stay and argue it."

" What a nice little man it is ! " his wife said, with delightful gravity. " Knotty points of the law don't trouble him, nor even the rights or wrongs of the case. It must simplify the trials of a judicial life enormously to reduce it to a family matter."

" The Mahommedans will be awfully pleased, and you'll get a present. I wonder what form it will take ? " he pursued.

" I wonder ! " she said drily.

" I'd rather have had a punkah to-night than a diamond brooch to-morrow," she remarked half an hour later when they sat at dinner, and beetles and other

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things crawled across the table-cloth in a straggling procession.

"It was certainly inconsiderate of them," he agreed, rescuing a poochey from imminent death in a peg glass.

"They are probably saving up for my present to-morrow."

"I wouldn't be surprised," Moung Gyaw replied, who, as I have mentioned before, had not a glimmering of humour in his entire being.

After dinner he drove off to the pwè, and, the boy having asked for leave to go to the town, Mrs Moung Gyaw was left alone. She fed her intellect with a magazine over two months old, until the oil in the lamp ran out. Then she crept to bed in the dark, and, having first carefully removed the sheet, laid her head, with many doubts and misgivings, on the bare pillow.

A little after three o'clock she was awakened from a troubled sleep by a very noisy arrival; it was Moung Gyaw returning. She could hear that he was talking unusually loudly. She wondered what had happened.

In a few seconds the door was kicked unceremoniously open, and her husband, supported on either side by the boy and the durwan, was assisted into the room, his head rolling about in a very detached fashion, his eyes bloodshot, and his evening-clothes in a ruinous state. She gazed at the group, so weirdly illumined by the strong rays of the watchman's hurricane lamp, in horror.

"Boy," she cried at last, drawing a dressing-gown

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up about her, "what has happened to master?" She thought that he must have met with some accident.

"Master getting plenty drunk, memsahib," the boy answered calmly, as, with the assistance of the durwan, he lifted Moung Gyaw on to the bed and loosened his collar, and then went in search of water to bathe his head.

Meanwhile, the master lay hiccoughing, and talking incoherently.

Mrs Moung Gyaw turned away her head so that she might not see him.

In a short time he fell into a heavy drunken slumber, of which the stertorous breathing and throaty gurgles filled her soul with shame. After a while, she felt she could endure it no longer, so, slipping her feet into slippers, she went and walked up and down outside, awaiting the dawn.

"This, at least, I have not deserved," she thought, as she paced to and fro over the hard ground.

When he woke some hours later, he was sober, and had at least the grace to be heartily ashamed of himself. After his bath, he sought his wife to make apology, and what other amends he could. She listened in silence to his explanation. It was a very plausible one: such a thing had never happened before, never would happen again; surely she would not be hard, but extend her forgiveness just this once?

In her heart she deemed his conduct a disgrace that admitted of no palliation — more especially as his

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companions had been Burmans; nevertheless, she never could be stern for long, so, with that fatal weakness that went so far towards marring her life, she answered:

"We'll look upon last night's account as closed between us, provided that you promise that it shall never occur again."

"Of course I promise," he exclaimed in a relieved tone; as well he could, seeing that, when it suited him, he cheerfully broke any and every promise, whether made to man or woman.

Then he started for the court-house, in reality nowise ashamed of having to face those who a few hours earlier had beheld him in so sorry a plight, and one so very disgraceful, from a Buddhistic point of view.

When the case was called, Monug Pay, arrayed in all the majesty of office, listened only to what Moung Gyaw had to say, and waiving the Burman advocate majestically aside with one mystic pass in the air of his fat paw, gave judgment for the defendant, expectorating on the floor to emphasise it.

"I need not ask the verdict," Mrs Moung Gyaw remarked when he joined her at tiffin.

"No, you need not," he replied, helping himself to mountains of rice and curry, which he proceeded to swallow in hurried, greedy fashion, clacking the spoon against his teeth at each mouthful in a way that always irritated her.

Presently, the eldest of the Mussulmans made his

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appearance, to thank his counsel and beg that they would stay on for a day or so.

"No; we must catch the afternoon train to Rangoon; I have a case before the J.C. early on Thursday," Moung Gyaw said curtly, at the same time glancing at his watch.

"I am sorry," murmured the visitor; then, turning to Mrs Moung Gyaw, he salaamed profoundly, and said:

"Would the memsahib honour her servants by accepting a little present from them?"

Mrs Moung Gyaw smiled graciously, saying, "they were very kind"—"that she hardly liked to," etc.—"but if they wished, why then, of course she would be very happy to." Whereat the Mahommedan gentleman's impassive saffron visage lit up wonderfully, and, salaaming once again, he withdrew.

"What did I tell you?" exclaimed Moung Gyaw triumphantly, as soon as they were alone, pausing in the picking of his teeth with the end of the serviette.

"You were quite right," she agreed, rising.

"I shouldn't be surprised if it were that Indian ruby he is wearing," he continued, letting his imagination take a slight canter.

"I should be very much surprised," she exclaimed doubtfully; nevertheless, as she put the last touches to her luggage, she could not help feeling mildly expectant.

Just when all their effects were being fastened securely

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into the bullock cart, the three Mahommedans could be seen wending their dignified way from the stone house towards the bungalow — the youngest, who followed behind, carrying a fair-sized box done up carefully in white paper and string.

When they arrived, and after the preliminary greetings had been got through, the elder of the three beckoned the younger to advance, which he did, at the same time proffering—with all the gravity that the occasion seemed to warrant—the white box into Mrs Moung Gyaw's hands. Her face flushed with pleasure, as she turned and thanked them, but when she made to cut the string, they all begged her not to, telling her to wait till she got into the train.

"Better do as they say," whispered Moung Gyaw; to which she somewhat reluctantly consented.

"I wonder what's inside?" she speculated, as they were driven rapidly to the station, turning the packet over to ascertain if anything indicated its contents.

"Something nice, I expect," he replied, feeling its weight.

"I *must* open it and find out," she exclaimed, and before he could stop her, she had torn the string and wrapper off, to find—a tin of Huntly and Palmer's Cracknel Biscuits!

It's a fine thing to have a sense of humour in any position in life, as Mrs Moung Gyaw's peal of delighted laughter amply testified. She was enormously amused.

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Not so Moung Gyaw; he could see nothing at all funny about the incident, and expressed himself very vigorously anent the way they had been, as he expressed it, tricked.

To this day, those Mahommedan gentlemen have not fathomed the reason of the scowling expression that disfigured their counsel's face as the train rolled out of the station, being such a strange contrast to his wife's merry smile and cordial leave-taking.

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CHAPTER XII

JUST before Christmas of that year they started for Akyab, the inducements being the races, return tickets at single fares, and the possibility of extracting some money from the old man.

It is a pleasant run to the province of Arakan in fine weather, and Mrs Moung Gyaw enjoyed it very much. The weather was quite perfect, and there were only a few passengers, all of whom were civil. The sea had a pleasant ripple, and on their arrival on the afternoon of the third day, they found the pier crowded with gorgeously-attired Arakanese, gathered together to gaze on the first English woman who had ever married one of their race.

As soon as the gangway was put across, Moung Gyaw's brother, Shway Tha, was the first to come on board.

"The father is here to greet your wife, and the mother waits in my bungalow," he said, as he shook hands with his sister-in-law, who felt nervous as she stepped ashore and was confronted by so many eager, curious, but not cordial glances. The marriage was

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distasteful to the people then and always, and they very wisely did not scruple to show it.

Standing somewhat in advance of all the others, and easily distinguishable by the sober richness of his attire and the lofty dignity of his bearing, stood the father.

"The old man," whispered Moung Gyaw in her ear. She smiled and put out her hand; it was taken into a cold limp clasp, and then dropped immediately, while the old gentleman's glance was steadily averted, which was, to say the least of it, disconcerting.

"Come on," cried her husband, quickly elbowing his way through the dense crowd of people, who fell slowly away from their advance. She followed, bewildered and afraid.

"Your father never looked at me," she said, as they neared the end of the pier.

"Oh no," Moung Gyaw replied, "it is not Arakanese custom for a father-in-law to look at his son's wife—it's not considered proper; it was wonderful his coming at all, and still more surprising his shaking hands." Then he helped her into the carriage that was in waiting, and all the crowd of people followed after.

She was silent. Her spirits rose as they drove along the sea-shore; she felt that this visit would be something to think of long after. A fresh breeze blew off the water that danced and sparkled in the sunshine; the mountains on the opposite shore were wrapped in blue ethereal mists; the great palm-trees waved against the sky.

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The crowd from the pier was slowly dispersing; everywhere there was light, colour, animation; all was brightness and gaiety—a blaze of carnation tints and golden hues.

Presently the carriage turned sharply out of the road through some low, broken gates, and drew up with a great flourish before a flight of wooden stairs that led up to a low, broad verandah running the whole way round a particularly spacious but decayed-looking bungalow, set down in the middle of the largest and most neglected - looking compound Mrs Moung Gyaw had ever seen.

Assisted by Moung Gyaw, she alighted, and they made their way into a bare room of very noble proportions, where Moung Gyaw's mother and many others waited the coming of the bride.

The former, a stately, sad-looking old lady, garbed in white and wearing no ornaments, sat in the middle, while grouped round were numerous relations, including many small children with wide-open eyes, wondering at so unwonted a scene.

Mrs Moung Gyaw paused for a second on the threshold, then approached her mother-in-law with diffident steps. The older woman held her hand for a second, and looked at her with a faint, fleeting smile, then she turned her attention to her son, and Mrs Moung Gyaw found herself free to take her seat where she best liked, none of the other ladies vouchsafing her any greeting.

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She took the nearest chair, and Moung Gyaw, leaving his mother, came to her.

"She is very pleased," he whispered, whereupon, the formal part being evidently considered at an end, there was a general stir. The women, murmurous, eager, and soft-voiced, talked among themselves in whispers, looking often in friendly silence towards her, while a few of the favoured ones or nearest relations were led forward one by one and presented to her, when Mrs Moung Gyaw smiled and made pretty speeches with the aid of Shway Tha's or her husband's interpretation. The children—so like small cups of chocolate—she patted on their heads, promising them sweets in an unknown tongue. She allowed her rings and brooches to be handled by long, brown, feminine fingers, while she answered all questions as to her parents, their age and her own, with interested amiability. Meanwhile, iced lemonade and biscuits were served, while many of those who had been on the pier arrived and gathered on the verandah without, and conversed amongst themselves.

Fully an hour passed, after which some faint weariness began to be evident; many eyes went towards the austere figure of the mother, who sat on alone in silence; she did not appear to see those appealing looks. Nevertheless, she beckoned Moung Gyaw towards her, and placed a common white handkerchief heavy with rupees into his hand. Then she rose, and was conducted with much ceremony to the entrance, after

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which a general move was made; all the women, with the exception of the mother, placed their slender long hands in Mrs Moung Gyaw's for one instant, and with quivering smiles slipped their feet into their waiting slippers, gathered their silk scarves about their graceful shoulders, slid from the room, and clambering into their closed carriages, were soon lost to view.

Mrs Moung Gyaw heaved a sigh of relief as she watched departure after departure. It had been a trying ordeal.

She removed her hat and veil, and lifted the hair from her brow. Being alone, she took a look round. The bungalow, rambling and ancient, had been built by a German over half a century before, and was considered on unusually generous lines: it commanded beautiful views of the harbour and hills beyond. The room in which she was, and those leading from it, were very sparsely furnished, while it was evident at every turn that the place had not been just erected. The boards heaved fitfully under the lightest of footsteps, the walls were stained with damp and adorned with a green mould, the French windows were cracked in some places, broken in others, while the ceiling cloth overhead hung in strips, and afforded the spectator glimpses of dark and cavernous depths beyond. In fact, on every side were unmistakable evidences of desolation and decay.

The old father had bought the place with others for a mere song, his shrewd brain and discerning eye telling

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him of its prospective value when Akyab expanded in size and importance; meanwhile, he permitted his son, Shway Tha, to reside in it at a fixed rent of a hundred rupees per month, on the strict understanding that all the repairs were to be done by the tenant.

"Should you like to come and see the dining-room?" Moung Gyaw enquired, when he had seen the last guest leave. He led the way across a large hall into a room similar in appearance to the one they had left, except that it contained a round dinner-table on which was spread a very soiled cloth, four chairs with cane bottoms, and a very old punkah, evidently recently put up. But what arrested and held Mrs Moung Gyaw's eye was the enormous quantity of bottles of champagne, brandy, whisky, claret, and liqueurs, with tinned goods of every description, that were piled up on the sideboard, in the corner, and on the floor.

"Is Shway Tha going to start a co-operative store?" she asked in astonishment.

"No," replied the person in question, who had just entered. "The fact is"—and he smiled as he rolled a cheroot—"the fact is," he repeated, "the old man actually gave me *carte-blanche* in the way of provisions for your coming." He paused.

"Yes," she murmured.

"Well, I thought I would take the opportunity to lay in a supply for myself, so I ordered all this, and more," adding: "He looked a trifle astonished when the bill was presented."

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"I should think he did," she remarked. "What did you say?"

"Oh, I said that all white people drank a great deal, and that he mustn't be surprised." Whereat Mrs Moung Gyaw laughed. She does not laugh when she recalls it now, knowing the evil meaning that was put upon it.

"Shway Tha is very cunning," she remarked to Moung Gyaw, as they dressed for dinner, "making provisions for months out of our visit."

"Yes," her husband replied; "but I shall want a bit out of that too."

Fortunately, Mrs Moung Gyaw had brought her own plate and linen, with which her own khansamah laid the table, while different members of the family had sent fruit and flowers, and the cook made a surpassing effort at a menu.

It was a cheery meal; the host delighted to have them, and Moung Gyaw at his best.

After dinner the father arrived to talk with his son, of whom he was in secret very proud; but the old gentleman was careful to take up his seat in the darkest part of the verandah, being afraid of encountering his daughter-in-law if he ventured within. He felt that he had sufficiently violated his own feelings and Arakan custom already to secure him an immunity from all further courtesies. U. Kyaw Thoo—(the "U" is a prefix indicating great respect)—was in those days about sixty-eight years of age, a self-made man. He had every reason to congratulate the maker, for, with-

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out the so-called advantages of a Western education, he was far in advance of his sons in keenness of intellect, energy, and commercial ability. He spoke no English, yet most of his biggest business transactions were conducted with Scotchmen, and woe betide him who tried to browbeat or humbug U. Kyaw Thoo! Starting with nothing, and unable to write his own name, he owned practically the whole of Akyab, and was considered, by those who ought to know, one of the richest men in the province. He had educated five of his children in England on an unusually liberal scale, and was, in consequence, spoken of as a likely subject for honours from the English Government. A remarkable man, of rare ability, just, honourable, and upright, U. Kyaw Thoo stands far apart from his countrymen, and must ever occupy a prominent position, not alone in the estimation of the English, but also in the memory of his late daughter-in-law.

He stayed talking with Moung Gyaw till nearly ten o'clock, then, throwing a fur coat round him, as the night was chilly, he departed, and Moung Gyaw joined his wife and brother in the drawing-room.

"What was your father talking about?" she asked, as he sat himself down.

"He talks of nothing but religion; he says it is the only fit subject for old people," he answered, lighting a cheroot. The father did not permit smoking in his presence.

"You did not tell me that he is building a pagoda,

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and putting a gold brick in in each of our names," he observed, addressing his brother.

"No," replied Shway Tha; "I thought I wouldn't spoil the pleasure of your arrival."

Mrs Moung Gyaw was interested. "How curious!" she cried.

"Curiously annoying, you mean. I wish to heaven he'd give me my brick now; I'd risk Nirvana cheerfully," Moung Gyaw said with annoyance.

"Why did you not suggest it?"

"Oh, he would have been furious. He has the most awful temper; that is why my mother is always wanting to retire into a convent."

Shway Tha nodded his head in acquiescence. "He kicked me out of the house last time I asked him for money," he told them; "and yet he knows how hard up I am."

"I expect it makes him angry, that whenever his sons go to see him, they ask him for something," she said, looking at them both.

"But what other use has a father?" Moung Gyaw replied. "I don't believe," he continued, "he cares for any of us once we've grown up; he said just now the reason he liked children so much was because they did not ask for money."

"Why don't you act on that hint?"

"Because I can't afford to."

"Shway Tha," his sister-in-law exclaimed, "I want Moung to tell the old man all about his debts, ask him

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to settle them, and Moung to pay him back gradually, with five per cent. interest."

"Did you ever hear a madder proposition than that?" interposed her husband contemptuously.

"Never!" his brother said emphatically. "Maud does not know the father, that's all."

"But," she protested, "it would be a business transaction; you would pay him interest."

"He can't take it from a relation," Shway Tha interrupted, shaking his head; "it is opposed to Arakanese custom."

Later on she grew to realise that any suggestion savouring of common-sense always appeared to run counter to that insurmountable stumbling-block, Arakanese custom.

As it was, she said: "If you only knew how the debts handicap us, you would agree with me in advising Moung to take any steps to lighten them."

"Oh, for goodness' sake!" cried Moung Gyaw irritably, "don't start that same old refrain; let one enjoy oneself for once."

The next morning they went out at six. It was delightfully cool, with a white mist, filmy as a bridal veil, wrapping the landscape in fascinating mystery. They drove by the Rifle Range out to the Cocoanut Plantation, which is a very beautiful spot just by the edge of the sea, where there was not a sound on the stillness save the voice of the waves or the occasional heavy thud of a falling cocoanut; the only sign of life

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being the faint black smoke of the outgoing British India steamer, too faint and far off to deface the marvellous blue and rose of the sky at the birth of day.

They walked for a while on the fine stretch of sands, and Mrs Moung Gyaw forgot for once that she was out in Burmah. Then they went to the racecourse, to see the paces of the ponies in their morning canters; after which they paid a visit to the bazaar, a clean, spacious, open-air place, where, however, the crowd gathered round so insistently that she was glad to seek a refuge in the gharri, while Moung Gyaw made his way amongst the people, laughing and talking, listening eagerly for the flattering incense that these simple folk were so ready to yield to the son of their richest man—unction which Moung Gyaw, in his egregious vanity, unhesitatingly laid to his soul; in fact, merely regarding it as a very small form of homage to his own overwhelming talents and attainments.

He made several small purchases — even applause never induced him to so far forget himself as to be generous—and then, followed by a small crowd of chattering Arakanese carrying his parcels, he joined his wife.

"Would you say that I was handsome?" he asked her abruptly, as they went homewards.

"No," she answered promptly. Having little or no vanity herself, she was not disposed to be particularly tolerant of any in him. "Why?"

"Those people said so just now," he replied, evidently

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pleased. Then he added thoughtfully: "They are a very 'cute people, the Arakanese."

She laughed a little. "They must be," she said.

"I wonder if they meant it?" he speculated.

"Of course they didn't, dear Moung; never believe people who deal in such base coinage as flattery. Listen to it, if you like, but banish it from your mind. It is, I can assure you, a very poor compliment to one's intelligence; that's what I dislike so particularly. As to your appearance, you have nothing to complain of. You have very good height and excellent health, you have beautiful hair, and when your clothes are made by a really good tailor you look extremely nice, and, what is even better still, good form."

He was silent. His wife had spoken the truth; inwardly he acknowledged as much, but he found it strangely unappetising.

Just then they reached the bungalow. He helped her out of the gharri; he wished that she — well, really, he didn't know quite what he wished.

They had a very merry breakfast; one or two young Arakanese, who had been in England, dropping in, there was much talk and laughter. Mrs Moung Gyaw potted the very fine prawns that are to be had in Akyab, and the rest of the food was excellent; she forgot everything disagreeable, and began to feel as she used to before her marriage.

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CHAPTER XIII

ALMOST before breakfast was finished, visitors began to arrive. Relations of Moung Gyaw's, to the remotest limit of relativity, poured in one after another, and prepared to make a day of it: Arakanese ladies in their best dress, with children, husbands, brothers, and cousins—the men invariably taking up their position on the verandah, the women inside. Many brought fruit, and, in two cases, an emerald ring and a gold bead necklace—the latter of hideous design, the former of doubtful value. It was a very trying morning for Mrs Moung Gyaw, who conducted a hopelessly disconnected stream of conversation through an interpreter, at the same time submitting to having all her clothes examined amid a running fire of comment in a strange language.

At midday, when the heat was great, and after the children had been repeatedly regaled with oranges, sweets, and cake, a most welcome move homewards was made, not, however, before most of them had promised to return a little later.

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In the afternoon there was to be a ceremonious reception at Lamadaw, where her father-in-law's house was situated, so, with a view to dissipating some of her fatigue, Mrs Moung Gyaw, giving orders that she was not at home to any more visitors, retired to rest.

At three o'clock she reappeared ready dressed, to find that three of the English residents had called between one and two, and that, the khansamah being off duty, the chokera, who had been equal to receiving the Arakanese, had become so flustered at seeing Europeans, that, wishing to do them all honour, he had taken a cracked washing-basin out of the bath-room, and carried it down to the gharris to receive their cards. Mrs Moung Gyaw laughed, it was so absurd; but Moung Gyaw was extremely annoyed.

"They will think we know no better," he said irritably, cuffing the offender across the mouth.

The way to Lamadaw lay through a somewhat crowded village, where on every side there was dirt, dust, noise, and smells, Lamadaw itself being no better. Mrs Moung Gyaw was secretly marvelling at the poverty of the brown huts and their surroundings, when the gharri drew up before a house of pucca, with gilded railings and green shutters, much larger and more imposing than any they had passed through, strangely incongruous by contrast with its neighbours. Sleeping in the wide porch were two durwans, who scrambled hastily to their feet at their advent, and ushered the

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visitors into a very large, long apartment, supported by heavy wooden beams, in which was gathered a most extraordinary conglomeration of things. Several cane-work chairs, placed in a circle, disputed possession with washing-stands, kitchen utensils, a bed, half-a-dozen iron-clamped boxes, a baby's box-cradle slung by a rope from the ceiling; while the corners, which were in almost impenetrable shadow, appeared to be stacked up with property of every sort and size.

There were no punkahs, and there was an indescribable odour of curry, dried fish, and human beings of the brown variety; no sun or air seemed to have ever penetrated within.

Moung Gyaw gave his wife a chair, and then went in search of his mother.

Mrs Moung Gyaw lifted her veil and opened her fan. There was the sound of scurrying bare feet overhead; otherwise the place was quite silent, wrapped in noonday heat.

Presently the mother appeared, accompanied by a short old woman with a face as if it had been carved out of a crab-tree, who, Moung Gyaw said, was an aunt; following them quickly came a troop of people not easily distinguishable in the dim light. Many chairs were produced; every one took up their position close to the round small table, where the mother already sat, and on which had been placed a gold chain and one of those conical-shaped Burmese diamond rings. At a given sign Moung Gyaw led his wife up to his mother,

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who solemnly placed the former round her neck, and the latter on her finger, amid a low murmur from the assembled guests—whether of approval or otherwise, subsequent behaviour on their part made it very difficult to determine.

Expressing her surprise and gratitude through Moung Gyaw, who had not prepared her for this mark of friendship, Mrs Moung Gyaw resumed her seat. Then there ensued what appeared to her a somewhat uncomfortable pause, while these strange, gaily-clad people gazed at her, and she at them. Every second saw some fresh arrival, until the dark, gloomy room, which was about as cheerful as the catacombs, must have contained some fifty persons. In the background, peeping from behind a large screen, the old father could be just seen. Moung Gyaw moved about, talking to all and sundry, but Shway Tha remained stationed beside her chair.

Letting her eye travel leisurely round, noting small details, Mrs Moung Gyaw had it suddenly arrested by the daintiest of visions in rose-hued silk, with a skin of wax and lashes long and black like night, who stood by the side of an oldish woman in somewhat shabby dress.

"Who is that charming child? She is just like a beautiful doll," Mrs Moung Gyaw enquired of her brother-in-law, at the same time indicating whom she meant.

"A cousin," he answered, looking in the girl's direc-

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tion. "She is called Shah Mah Phru, which means beautiful and fair, or white."

Just then the subject of their remarks turned her head towards Mrs Moung Gyaw; then, dropping her gaze, smiled with an enchanting shyness.

"I shall call her Shampoo," cried Mrs Moung Gyaw; "it is quite near enough. Please bring her up to me," she added. In obedience to which request he beckoned to Shah Mah Phru, and she came across and stood, looking nervously down at Mrs Moung Gyaw's knees, her tiny hands clasped tightly, and her lips quivering.

The white champac flower that was entwined in her hair was not whiter than Shah Mah Phru's skin, while her eyes, of an indescribable colour, looked out from under delicate level brows.

"What is her age?" asked Mrs Moung Gyaw, gazing kindly at the pretty, abashed little creature.

"She is twelve years of age," Moung Gyaw, who had just come up, answered.

"Shway Tha ought to marry her," his wife said.

"It would not do. Her people are very poor. The others would be jealous; some of them are so already at the attention you are paying her."

Mrs Moung Gyaw looked up and round. Her mother-in-law did not appear pleased at her action certainly.

"All the more reason he should marry her; I shall suggest it to him," she replied. She gave the child a filigree and enamel scent-bottle that she carried, and

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releasing her hand, let her go. Shah Mah Phru went back to her mother's side, very grave of demeanour, but secretly greatly delighted. Poor little Shah Mah Phru! already she had suffered too much from the spirit of her older and better-placed relations, more especially from Moung Gyaw's youngest sister, who, though young and very handsome, was of a mean and jealous temperament.

Shah Mah Phru met the latter's cold glance now, and did not feel very easy in her mind. Moung Gyaw perceived it also.

"You must make friends with my youngest sister," he whispered to his wife, adding: "She is Tsaw Hla's widow—you remember Tsaw Hla?" He alluded to a boy whom she had known in London.

"Oh yes. Will you bring your sister to me?" she said.

"No," he replied hastily; "being her elder brother, I cannot look at or speak to her; besides, she is afraid of me. I was the first man she had ever seen in English clothes, and she ran away and hid herself for hours. Shway Tha, however, can bring her to you," saying which, he moved away.

A few seconds later, Shway Tha led forward his sister. She was quite young, very slender, and very tall; she had a manner that was very assured, though dashed with a certain degree of graceful diffidence. In response to Mrs Moung Gyaw's invitation, she sat down beside her. She was dressed beautifully, and

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wore some fine jewels. When she had so seated herself, there was a slight pause, while Mrs Moung Gyaw cast round in her mind to find appropriate remarks.

After a few preliminaries anent the place and the day, Mrs Moung Gyaw asked her, through Shway Tha, if she would like to see England. It was quite an education to see the dark head, with its great diamond earrings, shake in unquestioning disapproval of such a suggestion.

"England was very well for the white people," she answered; "but as for the Arakanese, they were far better in their own country."

After a complimentary allusion to the undoubted beauty of their country from Mrs Moung Gyaw, the young girl remarked, quite of her own accord, "that her husband had gone all across the seas to that far country, and after he returned, he had died, and she had grieved greatly, just as her own mother had sorrowed when the father had insisted upon sending her brothers off by the big steamer to Calcutta, to the College there. Her mother," she continued, "had fled into the jungle with them, and had concealed herself there for days."

Mrs Moung Gyaw, hearing this, looked across at the sad, ascetic face of the mother, and tried to realise that the passionless, resigned expression had once hidden a restless, rebellious sorrow.

"What is your mother's name?" she asked softly of Shway Tha when the sister had silently and suddenly risen and vanished.

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"I do not know," he answered. "None of us could tell the mother's name, it would be contrary to custom; even to mention the father's aloud is wrong."

She was silent, thinking on what she had heard.

"We shall be able to go soon," Moung Gyaw murmured in her ear, almost immediately after.

"You ought to marry Shampoo, Shway Tha," his sister-in-law remarked to him, as, after having made a ceremonious farewell, they were driving homewards.

"I think I might," he replied gravely; and, three months later, he did.

Next time Mrs Moung Gyaw heard of Shah Mah Phru, she had two droll babies, the colour of brown Windsor soap, while she herself was trying to learn the A B C under her husband's tuition, with indifferent success.

The following day, the Akyab races began. An extraordinary sight the racecourse and its approaches presented, with so many people gathered there in the blazing sunshine, all animated and excited, and all intent on winning.

Never is Mrs Moung Gyaw likely to forget it or any of its details—least of all the unspeakable insolence of the greeting accorded to her by the few English women present, when she made her appearance. To say that they lifted their eyebrows, coughed conversationally behind their fans, smiled offensively, and drew their skirts around them, would be to give but a very inadequate idea of their demeanour. Mrs Moung Gyaw

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saw it all, and, whether from indignation or nervousness, the programme fluttered so that she dared not hold it up to read, and the course, the ponies, and the people danced in inextricable confusion before her gaze.

It was an odious moment to receive a rudeness so unmerited, and so impossible of retaliation; but she soon recovered the self-possession that for a few seconds had deserted her, and she glanced round quite coolly.

When the first race had been run, a Mr Redhead, a Scotchman, made his appearance — a gentleman about whom a fellow-countryman remarked, that when you saw him coming you involuntarily turned round to look for the sheep. Mrs Moung Gyaw had known him in England; he had dined with her parents, so she naturally greeted him with a certain amount of pleasure, but he passed her with the curtest of nods; and though his wife, a lady with a face unyielding as a tombstone, was seated next to her, he made no attempt to introduce them, but, on the contrary, withdrew his spouse ostentatiously from her neighbourhood. This was so funny, especially the manner in which it was done, that Mrs Moung Gyaw began to feel completely at her ease, and, if not edified, decidedly amused.

Of the nine races on the programme, four were won byher brother-in-law's ponies. This was received with vociferous applause by the Arakanese community, and

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chilling silence on the part of the English; indeed, two of the ladies favoured Mrs Moung Gyaw with a steady, withering stare, that made it hard for her to keep from smiling.

That evening she and Moung Gyaw had accepted an invitation to dinner from an Englishman, who was the burra sahib of a big firm of rice brokers of London, Rangoon, and Akyab, at which it was a noticeable fact, and one that his profuse apologies in vain tried to smooth over, that not a single resident he had invited, with the exception of one, and that a bachelor, had been able to come, and this in a place where amusements, even of the mildest form, are as difficult to get as rubies.

"I am glad we have not to seek anything further in the social line at their hands," she remarked when they drove home, the weird cry of the jackal echoing on the air, and the sea heaving fitfully in the moonlight.

"It's a good thing we don't live here," he answered.

"Yes; I am afraid they wouldn't have us here at any price," she said, adding: "We are not over-popular in Rangoon."

"I am," he rejoined stiffly; "here they would be too jealous to admit it."

"Don't blind yourself," his wife replied; "there would be no jealousy, only contempt; and I know nothing so wounding to one's self-esteem as contempt from those whom one privately despises."

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The next day they started back for Rangoon. No one was sorry to see them go. His people had undoubtedly looked on her advent as an unpleasant necessity, while the English had regarded it as an impertinence.

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CHAPTER XIV

At the end of January, the state of Mrs Moung Gyaw's health made it absolutely necessary for her to go to some bracing place. As there was no money available for a trip to the hills, her mother offered to pay her fare home to England, at which Moung Gyaw seemed very greatly relieved. So her passage was booked by the Scilli Billi line, and Mrs Moung Gyaw embarked one morning early in March.

When Moung Gyaw had bidden her good-bye, and gone back by launch, she stood leaning over the hand-rail while the ship cut away, watching the rice mills and the tall chimneys of Rangoon, as the ship moved past the piling teak, the Secretariat Building, and Poonzoondoung with its scattered buildings. The steamer floated leisurely between the low green banks that moved slowly back from them, gradually quickening speed when they reached Elephant Point, until soon they had left all trace of the muddy river and its sampans far behind.

As the last bit of Burmah faded from view, Mrs

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Moung Gyaw's soul seemed to bound within her. It would not be long, certainly, before she would return, but in the present hour she was homeward bound, and, above all, she was free — free, with a lovely breeze blowing, and a sparkling sea around.

Seven weeks later, Moung Gyaw received the following letter :—

"LONDON, *April*, 18—.

"DEAR MOUNG GYAW,—Maud arrived home last week, and we are delighted to have her with us again. We are, however, distressed at the change in her appearance; and her spirits, which used to be so high, have quite gone. However, this can probably be accounted for by her condition, and will return with restored health.

"To turn to other matters: our house, I need not say, is always open to Maud, but I think, under the circumstances, it would be more dignified and in keeping if she had some little place of her own; say, a small furnished residence, with two servants— nothing in any way extravagant, but just comfortable.

"I asked her what allowance you had arranged to give her, but she made me a very evasive and unsatisfactory answer, so I did not press the point, as I have a horror of anything that seems like prying, especially in a mother-in-law.

"One thing, however, puzzles me greatly. Maud is excessively shabby, and I have been urging her to buy

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some clothes. Before her marriage there was never any need to urge, but now she makes one excuse after another, until finally she to-day told me that she did not care to spend anything, unless absolutely necessary, as you and she wanted to save.

"This is a most extraordinary idea, and, I confess, perplexes me perhaps unduly; I should be the last to counsel any unnecessary expenditure, but it seems absurd to think that you, with your comfortable private income, your profession, and your expectations, should feel it incumbent on you to economise on such articles as clothes. I feel sure that Maud must be doing this to please you, as she never had any taste for thrift—in fact, it does not run in the family—so I want you to write and tell her that she must have some dresses, as it is not fair to you for her not to appear well. In this I feel sure you will agree with me.

"With regard to her allowance, if you send her fifty pounds for gowns, I think she can manage very well on thirty pounds per month.

"Needless to say, we shall take every care of her, and send her back to you strong and well."

To which he made reply:—

"DEAR MOTHER,—I was glad to get your letter, and to hear all about Maud, about whom I was most anxious.

"It is very distressing to me to read what you say about her dresses, but it was just the way over here. I never could get her to buy anything; in fact, one

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would almost say that she was penurious—only it is, somehow, a word that hardly fits her.

"Of course I should be only too glad to send fifty pounds, and thirty pounds' allowance, but I fear that she would never be persuaded into accepting it. If you can induce her to do so, only let me know.

"I am longing for her return, for I miss her terribly.—Yours affectionately, MOUNG GYAW."

To his wife he wrote:—

"DEAREST MAUD,—I have had a very worrying letter from your mother about your allowance. Of course, I never anticipated having to send you *any*thing; I thought you would have lived for nothing, and got on with what clothes you have. I am glad you have had sense enough to keep your own counsel about my financial affairs, but, to allay her suspicions, I have offered—provided you consent—to accede to her requests, viz., fifty pounds for clothes, and thirty pounds' allowance, which you will, of course, refuse. If she insists on your having something, all I can send would be ten pounds, and that would be a struggle. You, however, could tell her it was twenty pounds.

"It's a frightful nuisance, your going to have a baby. If you have to remain in England, you must try and get a cheap doctor, and let's hope it will be born dead.—Ever yours, MOUNG."

When he had folded and sealed these two letters, it was late. He called for the boy, and said:

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"Boy, take gharri and go to the town; master wanting woman."

Then began for Mrs Moung Gyaw those months of intense suffering, the pain of which even now has in no way faded from her memory — days, months, in which she made excuses for this man, deceiving her mother, in order to save her pain; for she felt, rightly, that, as her mother had approved the marriage against all advice, if she ever guessed the real truth, the blow would be one of surpassing bitterness. At all costs there must be silence, then and always.

The time went by.

Some extracts from a diary, kept at that time, may throw some faint light on things as they were :—

"*May* 12. My birthday: I am twenty-two years old, and I feel a century. The days are so long and so hopeless!

"Happiness! Is there such a thing? Yes, of course, of course, but not for me. Everything is grey and chill, and yet—and yet—one must not grow pessimistic, whatever happens, or one may end in . . . what?

"Mother is so good, and I feel so grateful.

"It is so nice to be studied and always thought of—so different to Rangoon.

"*May* 14. He sent me six pounds' allowance for this month; mother cannot understand why I never spend anything, never go anywhere, but I cannot tell her, it would grieve her so. How I wish I could! I

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hate to appear mean. Crime itself has always seemed preferable to meanness. Will the future be difficult, I wonder? Oh yes, things must improve. One cannot always be destined to stand outside of life, like a beggar outside golden gates.

"How I wish that I could have a little place of my own; one would then feel independent! How unfair it seems to be bearing all the troubles and the regrets of marriage, and to be debarred from its smallest privileges!

"Do I grumble too much, I wonder?

"Do I underrate what I have got, in my longing for something better? I hope not, oh, I hope not.

"I feel ill, and my head always aches. The doctor comes often, and I fear the expense; besides, what is the use? he talks a lot of nonsense. I have, I am afraid, as little faith in doctors as Napoleon had.

"How different existence is to what I dreamt once!

"How one's dreams dissolve like a mirage before the reality! Why does one ever dream? It is only to cheat oneself with fair elusive hopes.

"How long the days are, and always that growing burden!

"I go out walking in the dark. I hate these bright days, when all the world seems laughing under the lilac and laburnum trees. How exclusive discontent makes one!

"They seem to almost distrust me at home now, since I have grown so mean.

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"*May* 20. His letters are so unsatisfactory, so evasive, so lacking in truth, they fill me with misgivings. How different are these English husbands, whom I watch now so often and so eagerly! There is my old friend, Hetty Gordon; she has been married eight years, and I think he'd scratch the skies down for her if she only breathed the wish.

"But I—I have no hope; I see no pleasure in the present, no light in the future. There is not one in whom I can confide, which is perhaps as well; yet I hate not being frank and open, at least with the home people. How disappointing everything is! So different to all that one once thought! The weeks seem huddled together, dull and colourless, like a heap of broken toys. I am wretched . . . wretched."

Ten days later:—

"My mother suspects something. She opened the letter from the agents, containing the monthly draft. She questioned me, but I would not, could not, tell how we all had been deceived. Is this affection, or only weakness? I do not know.

"It would be such an offence to her pride . . . and to mine.

"Meanwhile, when at times I feel a mortal loneliness, the future seems to rise before me like a phantom, and say:

"'In the past you did as you desired; I shall give you nothing but the fulfilment of that desire. If

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the fruit has a bitter flavour, blame yourself, not Fate.'"

Six weeks later :—

"My mother, it seems, wrote him a most indignant letter. He is furious; he blames me; he says it is all my fault; that I am careless, unkind, both—and more, much more.

"How sick and weary I am! What is the use of anything? My old friend Frank died a week ago. I do not pity any one who leaves this world; I keep my pity for those who remain behind."

Three weeks later :—

"I am in lodgings by his wish. He sent me twenty-five pounds, and he is coming over at once. What for, I cannot fathom; certainly not affection for me.

"I dread his coming; I hate the idea. He travels by the mail, so he will be here very soon.

"My people are very pleased. They see in his advent only anxious solicitude for my welfare.

"Trust, Faith, and Confidence, why cannot you and I go walking together? . . . He arrived yesterday morning; the weather is clouded and overcast. He does not tell me much, but what he has said is enough. He has mortgaged the house to Chundera, he will not say for how much, only that he intends to stay in London to try and get something to do. He is crazy, I think. He has gone out now. I am alone; I feel low, and dispirited, and foolish.

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"I sit and brood, and I think I grow misanthropic in my dread of what we shall have to face, especially if the child lives.

"I have only just heard that my mother has taken a charming house for us, and is furnishing it. The rent is nearly a hundred and fifty pounds a year. How shall we pay it? It is maddening to accept these responsibilities. They did not consult me till the lease was signed. He adjures me to keep silence, and says that all will be well. What ought I to do? I do not know. I speak the truth, I do not know. I am ill, I am worried. I feel as if I was caged, and so compelled to acquiesce in everything. When will the end come, I wonder?"

Then there is a lapse of over three weeks, after which comes the following entry:—

"The baby was born, and died. Am I glad, or sorry? I am glad.

"I am up for the first time.

"He has taken a room at the Temple, and is going to look for pupils, so he says. We are in the new house, and it is beautifully furnished, and the rooms are gay with flowers . . . only twilight is with me.

"Moung is out a great deal. He gave me ten pounds the other day to buy some things; he said he had won it.

"My young brother-in-law comes a great deal; he

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tells me that Moung is always at the races. I hope not; it will only end badly.

"I feel that I must try and make money. I shall open a business of some kind or other. I shall grow dreadful if I stay at home every day and think.

"Moung got a pupil to read law with him yesterday. He paid a fee of a hundred pounds. We feel very jubilant; things are brightening.

"I have an idea that is quite original; what if I exploit it?

"I have taken rooms in Bond Street. I have absolutely no capital, but am getting the furniture on the hire system. After all, one can only fail."

That is the last entry in the diary for the year.

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CHAPTER XV

At the beginning of the following year she opened her business in Bond Street. Want of capital was a heavy handicap, for, being a very novel scheme, it required plenty of advertising. However, Mrs Moung Gyaw worked hard, starting from the house in Bayswater each morning at eight-thirty, carrying her luncheon in her pocket, and walked back at night. She could not spare money even for omnibuses in those days. What was over, if anything, went towards the home housekeeping, to which Moung Gyaw contributed very grudgingly, complaining that his fares to and from the Temple chambers and luncheons swallowed up a good deal; nevertheless, he always had money for everything, and rarely by any chance walked. Trudging wearily home of an evening, how his wife envied him the underground railway, or the cab that more frequently brought him back from the Temple!

At that time the business was barely paying its way, and to keep it going was a work of much time and labour. And rent-day was approaching perilously fast.

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"You won't forget," she said to him one morning early, "that a cheque will be wanted very shortly for the first quarter of this house?"

"I'm very sorry," he stammered, "but I shan't be able to pay it. We must ask your mother to do it. After all, she took the house."

"You encouraged her to do it. Besides, surely you have money?" she exclaimed in dread. It was impossible that his store could be exhausted.

"Oh yes, I have some; just enough to get along with, and no more."

"But I should hate to ask mother; it would seem so unfair," she said slowly.

"It can't be helped; it must be done, and I shall look to you to do it." He spoke quite firmly, and by way of emphasising the finality of the discussion, went out and closed the door behind him.

The thought was sickening to her; still, it had to be faced. If he said he could not pay, she well knew that he would not; so, with sinking heart, she went to her mother and explained the situation, for the first time laying before her the greater part of the truth about his financial affairs.

Mrs Cardwell listened in silence to the guarded account given her. She was deeply incensed, but, being a woman of extremely strong character, she was quite philosopher enough to be aware how weak and futile a thing it is to moan over what is past. Perhaps, being a very haughty person, and one who prided herself on her

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unerring judgment of men, she felt most of all the insult to herself in his deception. Under these circumstances, it was extremely characteristic of her to decide to keep this unpleasant information back from Maud's father, who might not be disposed to view the matter leniently.

Sorry for her daughter she was, and neither then nor after did she cease to blame herself most bitterly for the part that she had played at the time of the marriage; nevertheless, she believed in her son-in-law and his future. She had always been blind to some very obvious faults, and, happily for her, entirely ignorant of others.

Nevertheless, it was a heavy blow, this knowledge, and it was not until she had rallied considerably that she had an interview with Moung Gyaw. What took place between them, how much she blamed, or what excuse he pleaded, his wife never actually knew for certain: though, judging from her mother's attitude afterwards, she always thought, and in so thinking undoubtedly touched the truth, that he had succeeded in making his own case good by adopting the hackneyed and dangerous proverb, all is fair in love. And once he was cleared, if only partially, what else in all the world mattered?

At least the clouds of deception and misconception had cleared away. His wife felt that a load, of whose weight she had long been growing weary, had been lifted. Strange to relate, however, almost from that

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day, right onwards during the rest of their residence in England, other shadows began to gather fast around them — troubles which, if not very mighty in themselves, still, from their continuity, were far harder to face; then single great ones began to threaten.

The first began with a loss of five-and-twenty pounds from theft in her business, which went nigh to being its death-blow.

Returning home that night, more downcast than she had been for months, Mrs Moung Gyaw was greeted with a fawn-coloured paper document: the Queen's taxes, nineteen pounds, ten shillings.

"We must see to this," she said to her husband, when he joined her in her room some half an hour later. He took the paper, and, raising his eyebrows a little at the total, laid it aside.

"Something very unfortunate happened to me to-day," he commenced, sinking into the arm-chair.

"What?" she asked faintly. She feared she knew not what. Anything, everything, was possible — nay, probable.

"Well, I went to the races," he began; "and — don't stare at me like that," he cried pettishly — "I had my watch and chain stolen."

"Stolen! How? by whom?" she asked vaguely.

"How can I tell?" he said impatiently. "I know that I put them in the back coat for safety, and when I felt for them they were gone."

"The back pocket of your coat for safety!" she

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exclaimed. She felt almost inclined to laugh aloud, from sheer anger at his absurdity.

"You must go to Scotland Yard at once," she continued abruptly. He shook his head.

"No use," he said.

"Perhaps not, but at least one must make an effort." She spoke insistently.

"I shan't do anything," he replied, obstinately staring gloomily into space.

"But you must; the chain was so valuable, so——"

"Oh, I know all that," he rejoined irritably.

"It is too vexing," she pursued; "if it had only been any other watch and chain but my grandfather's."

"It's most unfortunate," he admitted. "But still, I think I am far more to be pitied."

She was silent. Her face was averted from him, so that he could not see its expression.

"You must make my excuses to your mother; I shall not dine there to-night."

"I!" she echoed, gazing at him blankly.

"Yes, you—you are far the best person; you can say it was quite an accident, and very much to be deplored."

"I couldn't think of it," she declared emphatically. He looked at her in surprised annoyance. He was so used to her submission to his requests that he was hardly prepared for so evidently firm a refusal.

"If you won't, neither will I," he said crossly.

As you like. Thank goodness, it is your affair, and

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not mine; but I think that you owe it to my mother to be at least frank about it. You must remember how much my father wanted the chain, and she gave it to you."

"It would be so dreadfully disagreeable," he said in his weak way, "and I cannot face disagreeable things. There are some people of a coarser fibre" (he looked at her), "to whom annoyances say so little."

"I am afraid I have never met them," she answered briefly, as she took a hat from the wardrobe preparatory to going out.

"You are not coming?" she asked, as she put on her gloves.

"No," he replied; "I shall go down to the Debating Society to-night. Make my apologies to your people."

"Good-night," she said, and went out and down the stairs into the wet dark street alone.

She felt chilly and old.

"Would things be always as they were now?" was the tormenting thought that came to her as she went onward.

Just then a man passed, and seeing a young and unprotected woman, wheeled quickly round and murmured some few, unintelligible words; she pressed on faster, her cheeks burned, the tears rose to her eyes. The contrast of her lonely position as compared with that of even the few women that she knew, jarred on her sharply. She was only twenty-two. She had

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done, knowingly, no harm to any living soul, and yet——

Her lips closed fast with pain.

Was it a mistake never to be expiated?

Would she always drag a galling chain?

Must one always suffer without hope of absolution because once one has said before an altar, "I will"?

The following day she reminded him of the tax-paper.

"I cannot pay it," he replied; "I have no money."

"I can hardly ask mother to do this," she said.

"No," he rejoined, "I did not propose that you should. I thought that you could pawn one of your brooches. It will never be missed. Besides, they seem rather out of keeping, now that your gowns are so shabby."

She coloured slightly.

"I have never been to a pawnbroker's," she murmured; "if that is the only way, perhaps you would take it?"

"Oh no," he declared quickly; "I might be seen: that would never do. You can easily go on your way to Bond Street, and if you can borrow more than the twenty pounds, you might give the balance to me."

"I shall only get just what is necessary," she remarked coldly, and then went with heavy footsteps upstairs to where her pretty jewel-case stood, and with trembling fingers and almost blinded eyes, chose a small dragon-fly of diamonds, that quivered on its emerald stem.

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It was the only possible means, and, perhaps, after all, certainly the most dignified. She shut the lid down and turned the key with a sharp click, then brushed the tears of an unavailing regret aside.

That afternoon (it was a Saturday), as she sat resting in the drawing-room after a wretched walk home, her young brother-in-law called.

"I thought I'd come in and see you," he began cheerily, "as I had nothing better to do." He was quite a boy, nice-looking, and a favourite with her.

"I say, you're looking rather off colour," he observed, as he drew a chair up to the tea-table and regarded her with friendly solicitude.

"That means I'm looking hideous, I suppose," she said, smiling at him. His good spirits were always infectious.

"Oh no, you could never do that," he answered gallantly. She laughed slightly, and said:

"This unsolicited testimonial is most gratifying," adding: "And what mischief have you been getting into since I saw you last?"

"None at all," he answered; "never have enough spare cash to compass any." He spoke in a slightly aggrieved tone. His sister-in-law smiled. The boy suffered from chronic financial anæmia.

"Were you at the Debating Society last night?" she asked a little later.

"Rather; it's too amusing to miss. I saw Boss afterwards" [this was his name for Moung Gyaw] "in

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Jimmy's Restaurant, having supper with such a pretty girl." He was not looking at her as he said this. "Doing themselves well, too—oysters and champagne."

He made the statement with an air of perfect innocence. In any case, he would have been quite unable to understand that such an occurrence should either hurt or even passingly annoy his listener.

"Really?" she said, after an imperceptible pause. "How very interesting!"

"Oh, he's often with that girl," he continued confidentially, deceived by the absence of all bitterness in her tone. "You don't mind, of course?" he added.

"Not in the least," she answered, and there was no displeasure on her face or in her voice.

"Still, I think he might keep the champagne for you," the boy remarked.

"He might, but he doesn't."

"After all, poor old thing, you don't have a very good time. That beastly business for ever, and no money."

"Not a wildly exciting life, certainly," she conceded mildly.

"He's always enjoying himself; you have no idea how frequently he is at the races, when he tells you he's in chambers."

"I'd much rather not know. However, I happen to know that he was at the races yesterday, because he had his watch and chain stolen."

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"Stolen!" He spoke with much surprise.

"Yes, stolen."

He laughed slyly.

"Don't you believe it," he exclaimed; "I know better."

"My dear Peechay," she answered with hauteur [Peechay was his pet name], "I really must protest; you are disrespectful to me, no less than to your brother."

"I am very sorry," he stammered; "I did not mean to offend you."

"You have an unfortunate weakness, and one that it would be well to correct," she said unkindly; "you talk too much."

"How like a woman," he exclaimed, "to encourage one to tell her things, and then snub one!" The outburst was so genuinely boyish, that she laughed outright.

"I bow to your superior knowledge of my sex," she said; "and now let us talk of other things."

"You won't make any use of what I told you; that is, you won't tell him?" he asked anxiously, when he was about to take his departure.

"I won't if you wish not," she answered, and the boy was obviously relieved.

The following day, Sunday, being exceptionally fine, she suggested to Moung Gyaw at breakfast that they might take a trip to Kew or Richmond.

"I am sorry," he said; "I should have been delighted to have gone, but, unfortunately, I promised to

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go to chambers and give Monug Khin" [his law pupil] "an extra two hours. It's growing so near the Bar exam."

"Oh, it does not matter in the least," she rejoined. "I'll sit in the garden and read instead."

At three o'clock he went out, and he appeared, from a passing glance, to have taken unusual care over his toilet. She smiled a little; no matter how depressing might be their affairs, he always found time and pleasure in his clothes. The reflection amused her somewhat, though mentally she acknowledged the wisdom of studying appearances.

The following morning, when she came down early, she found a letter-card on her plate, which, without more than carelessly examining the address, she opened. It was in a very scrawly hand, and contained only a few lines.

"My Dear,—I was so sorry not to have been able to keep my appointment with you yesterday afternoon, but I had a bad swollen face.

"Try and get away from her, and meet me nine o'clock outside Royal Oak public-house as usual.—Yours, as ever, Molly."

Mrs Moung Gyaw laid the open card beside the place laid for him, and leaving neither apology nor comment, set out on her business. The truth had dawned on her, swift and poisonous as an adder.

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Her mouth curled scornfully as she recalled the written words. He had told her another lie. How weak and mean! And yet, if the truth were told, she did not care; all feeling, even that of resentment, seemed to be leaving her. The sordid anxieties and countless worries of her present existence had the effect of sweeping all other emotions completely before them.

When they met that evening, she said no word to him. For a second their glances met, and whatever he read in hers, he to a great extent lost the feeling of nervousness that had haunted him throughout the day.

He was sensible that for a long while past he had lost all dignity in her eyes, but it was not a reflection that troubled him unduly.

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CHAPTER XVI

ONE evening, after dinner at home, her mother and father strolled back with them; it was a fine clear night, and the air was tempting.

"Won't you come in?" Mrs Moung Gyaw suggested when they reached the gate. Her invitation was accepted, and then a very unpleasant incident occurred.

When Mr Cardwell had mixed and tasted his whisky-and-soda, he looked at it very suspiciously.

"What is the matter?" asked his wife.

"I don't know," he replied; "but the whisky is curiously weak."

Whereupon Moung Gyaw made a somewhat hurried and absolutely irrelevant remark, of which no one took any notice.

"Let me taste it," said Mrs Cardwell, and the glass was passed across the table to her.

"Oh! but it's been watered," she declared decisively.

"That's what I thought," the old gentleman answered.

Mrs Moung Gyaw looked across the table, and

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remembering one or two suspicious occasions before, felt vaguely uncomfortable.

"It's a very great shame," Mrs Cardwell exclaimed, when, the decanter having been held up to the light, the clear amber liquid was seen to be all cloudy.

"I can hardly believe Robert would do such a thing," she continued. Robert was an old retainer, and was serving as butler at merely nominal wages.

"I am sure he would not," Mrs Moung Gyaw interposed. Robert, she had every reason to know, could be trusted.

"Very extraordinary!" Mrs Cardwell remarked, perfectly unsuspiciously, and there the subject was allowed to drop.

Only just a week later, Mrs Moung Gyaw's vague suspicions were destined to become certainties.

Returning to the dining-room somewhat unexpectedly one night, she saw her husband standing, water jug in one hand and whisky bottle in the other, busy pouring the former into the latter. Turning suddenly, he perceived her, and became almost livid with fury. He put the things down and faced her.

"And you would have let Robert be blamed!" she said scornfully.

"Damn you!" he cried. "What the devil do you come spying after me for?"

"I did not spy after you," she answered, and came into the room and closed the door softly after her, for fear the servants should overhear.

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Not heeding her words, he flew into a violent passion, and taking her by the shoulders, he shook her till she could hardly stand. Dazed, bewildered, hurt, the spirit rose within her, a great sob choked her; she struck at him blindly with her hands; she owed him nothing, nothing, but a wounded heart and spoiled life.

"You shall never touch me again," she cried at last, and escaping from his clasp, she made for the hall door, and banging it after her, ran down the steps into the silent street; there was not a soul in sight, not even a policeman. She hesitated for a second, uncertain which way to turn, then made for a quiet square that ran at the top to the left; she hardly knew where she went, she only knew that she must go away at all risks, at all costs, at least for a few hours. The danger or the strangeness of such conduct on her part never struck her. She had been treated in a way that was unpardonable, and the one idea present to her mind was to put as great a distance as possible between her and the perpetrator of it.

For two hours she paced the lonely square and quiet avenues running from it, till a constable, who had been watching her, and wondering what a woman, young, and evidently a lady, could be doing at such an hour alone, followed her at a respectful distance, the steady tramp of his feet warning her of his proximity.

But by this time she was beginning to feel quite worn out; and well aware that with neither money nor luggage she could get no shelter at a hotel or lodging,

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so with slow step she made her weary way back to the house and let herself quietly in with her latch-key. As she did so, she heard subdued voices in the dining-room, and the electric lights were burning. As the hall door opened, Moung Gyaw came out into the hall.

"Your mother is here," he whispered hurriedly.

"My mother!" she repeated, staring at him; "why is she here?"

"I fetched her; you alarmed me so. Don't tell her, for God's sake, what passed between us," he entreated, adding: "It would fret her so." His profound duplicity always told him what chord to play on, to awaken his wife's acquiescence.

"As you wish: I do not care," she replied, and her voice was hollow with fatigue. Then she followed him into the dining-room, where Mrs Cardwell sat, in a long cloak cast over a dressing-gown, and a fichu on her head to cover the fact that she was wearing no wig. She looked at her daughter with hard, cold eyes.

"How dare you behave like this?" she cried, waiting for no explanation. "You ought to be thoroughly ashamed of yourself." She half rose from her chair as she spoke, and she seemed to expand with passion.

Mrs Moung Gyaw heard her with indignant and bewildered amaze. Her mother taking his part!—this, indeed, was unexpected. She was yet to learn that, in any real crisis of her life, her mother would be the first to blame, the hardest to convince, the last of all to forgive. If Mrs Cardwell had the brain and

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determination of a strong man to conquer and succeed in life, she had also the harshness of the hardest man. The rigid laws and narrow creeds that she laid down for herself, she applied to every one else, without any allowance for diversity of circumstance or of character.

Mrs Moung Gyaw was silent, though a momentary sense of rage passed quivering over her.

"Have you no explanation of your outrageous behaviour?" Mrs Cardwell asked, her voice vibrating with barely suppressed fury.

"No; I have none." She turned away indifferently.

"How dare you give me such an answer? how dare you? You wander about the streets in the middle of the night, alarming your husband and your parents, and then say that you have no explanation to offer! You must be mad, or perhaps we need seek no further for the cause of the whisky being watered?"

Her daughter's face grew white to the lips, under the intolerable and unmerited insult of the last words. Years, long years after, she marvelled at her own weakness in not speaking out then and there, in spite of any promise. Why had she been faithful to the faithless? How futile and weak! How productive of useless pain! Instead, she made answer:

"If you have nothing further to say, I will go to bed. I am very tired." Her mouth trembled a little. Truly, she *was* very tired.

"Out of this room you don't go, madam, until you have apologised to both of us."

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Mrs Moung Gyaw looked her mother full in the eyes. To her she owed everything that she had ever owned or enjoyed. As long as the truth could be hidden, it should. Then she said very quietly:

"I am very sorry, mother, that *you* should have been worried in this matter. *I* certainly never should have roused you." The calm voice shook a little with serene contempt, though always she kept her gaze averted from her husband. "It appears to me wholly unnecessary, and most unkind, and——"

"Your husband did his duty; you owe him a far greater apology than you do me."

Mrs Moung Gyaw's lip curled.

"I owe him nothing, nothing," she exclaimed passionately, the bitter sense of the injustice of her position almost breaking down the barrier of her self-control. Then, without another word or look, she left them.

Mrs Cardwell glanced interrogatively at Moung Gyaw.

"What did she mean by that?" she asked.

"I do not know, dear mother," he replied with graceful deference. "Maud is very excitable," he continued with well-assumed reluctance. "I have suffered much from her tempers, but it is only natural to youth." He looked her candidly in the eyes.

"It is not at all natural," Mrs Cardwell said sternly, rising from her seat. "I shall have a great deal more to say on this subject, and, if necessary, I shall get her father to talk seriously to her. We will see if we can't break such a spirit. And now, will you accompany

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me home ?" She looked towards him. He took up his hat and prepared to follow.

" You must not be harsh," he entreated, as he wrapped her cloak carefully round her and opened the door.

" Desperate cases require desperate remedies," Mrs Cardwell said, switching the electric light off as they passed out.

" Every one has their faults," he remarked, as if he had only just realised so unpleasant a fact. He closed the gate behind, and offered her his arm.

" You don't appear to have any," Mrs Cardwell remarked softly, pressing his arm affectionately.

" You forget I deceived you once," he reminded her softly.

" That was very wrong," she observed, with mild reproach ; " but you did it for love. And really, I almost think that my daughter's unnatural return for that devotion exonerates you."

" You are too good," he murmured, with relief and modesty admirably blended in his tone.

" Not at all ; I am only just."

He sighed deprecatingly, and so, in a state of mutual admiration, they continued their walk towards home.

Meanwhile, the subject of their discourse, having shut herself in her room, paced the floor, overcome with an agitation that she could not conquer. She had a sense that in a way her life was over. A kind of horror seized and enwrapped her at the prospect of seeing him again, and dwelling in apparent amity by

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his side. Her first impulse was to cut adrift, never to see his face again; but very brief reflection showed her how impossible such a course would be. She walked to and fro, and then came and sat down in the arm-chair and leant her head upon her hands, while the hopelessness of this marriage of hers swept over her senses in all its uncompromising nakedness.

Presently she heard the hall door open and close, followed by footsteps and the cautious turning of the handle of the door of the room next to hers, followed by silence.

She rose and undressed, and lay down on the bed. Night wore on to dawn, bringing her no sleep, no dreams. She was in that state of acute pain that only youth, in its wonderful exaggeration and pathetic ignorance, can ever suffer. Insulted, deserted, disbelieved, even by the one person to whom she had ever rendered all her devotion, her very soul seemed to rise in rebellion.

That she herself was to blame—that if he were weak, she was no less so—she did not then realise. That was to come after.

At a little after eight o'clock the following morning, Mrs Cardwell called for her daughter, and offered to walk with her across the Park towards Bond Street.

"I am more pained and grieved than I can say, about last night," she commenced, as soon as they had left the house.

"I am sorry, as I said, that you should have been troubled," her daughter replied slowly.

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"It was quite right that I should be troubled, as you call it," was the quick retort.

Mrs Moung Gyaw remained silent. The man who needed the help of his mother-in-law to control the wife whom he had struck, seemed to her indeed a puerile member of his sex.

"Are you not happy?" her mother asked, suddenly looking into the other's heavy eyes.

"Who is ever happy?" was the cold reply.

"You grow cynical, and that is not to be tolerated in a young woman."

"I must try and correct it." She spoke wearily.

"I think you must try and correct many things," her mother continued; "your temper most of all. You have got a particularly kind and gentle husband, with whom your methods are far too harsh." She took her daughter's arm within hers as they walked, as a sign that she was not angry. She meant in all honesty to be gentle, but, unfortunately, gentleness found no place in Mrs Cardwell's nature.

"If I am too harsh, he has his consolations," Mrs Moung Gyaw said. "He goes to other women," she added bitterly.

"And if he does, which I much doubt, he is not to blame; no doubt your coldness has driven him to seek sympathy elsewhere. With that you have nothing to do. Men—especially young men—have many weaknesses, which mean nothing, and which only foolish women worry about. Most men," she went on

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earnestly, "want women as they want their cigars after dinner. You surely need not be jealous of such lapses, in any case. You are his wife, and as such must do your duty."

"I try to." The words came with difficulty; her mother's sentiments, unexpected as they were, opened up a new and far more bewildering vista of life's side-issues than any she had hitherto dreamt of.

The rest of their walk passed for her in a kind of trance, in which she only dimly heard, and still more dimly understood, her mother's reiterated admonitions and advice. They parted in Park Lane, and Mrs Moung Gyaw made her way to her place of business, to face a particularly harassing day. Often, throughout the long hours, her mother's words returned to her, always with a sense of incredulity and despair. She wondered dully if all mothers took such views; if all women were so indulgent to the frailties and weaknesses of men, when those men were their husbands. It seemed all very incomprehensible to her, and thinking by no means made the justification clearer, or brought the solution of it nearer. It seemed so unjust, so opposed to any idea of right, that all the duties of matrimony should fall on the weakest shoulders; and in her heart of hearts she rejected it.

It was, of course, impossible to openly disagree with her mother; nevertheless, she resolved to wait and learn, and in the end, without any reference to others,

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decide for herself where exactly wrong became right, and right something else.

Moreover, she felt convinced that in some things even age was not as wise as it deemed itself to be.

From that time onward their affairs seemed to grow rapidly worse; everything she essayed was unlucky. He complained daily of having no money, that his account was melting, and that there seemed no prospects. Gradually her jewellery went bit by bit; she grew to know every flagstone on the road to the pawnbroker's, and to shrink in loathing from its every disagreeable detail.

To her mother she feared to speak; they had grown somewhat apart since that morning. Confidence is like a bird; it will rarely nest save where it is sure of safe shelter. She had spoken those few words to her mother in a moment of feeling, and the manner in which they had been received had left a coldness as of frost upon her heart.

Gradually, unconsciously, she made for herself a life apart in thought and aspiration from those around. And how monotonous and melancholy was that life, with its troubles, its disappointments, its petty economies, its absence of all pleasure, barren as some vast desert! And if, if only the troubles, the lack of money, had been endured for some one for whom she had cared, for some one who would grow only dearer—why, then, how different! As it was——

Awhile later, and her business was at an end; she

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was doing her best to get rid of the premises, and wondering what next she could do. There was nothing coming in at all now; her mother supplied the house with provisions. Robert and his wife were under notice. They were to manage with a girl. Then Moung Gyaw returned rather earlier than usual one day, and brought her a small bunch of flowers. He had never done such a thing before, at least in London, and her surprise spoke in her expression.

"I won five pounds on a horse to-day," he exclaimed.

She laid the flowers down; their source gave her no pleasure.

"I brought home this too," he continued, and taking a bottle of champagne from his back coat pocket, he looked at her.

"You do not seem pleased," he said.

"I am afraid," she answered, "that I do not think that even the sudden accession of five pounds justifies us in such purchases."

"Oh, don't be so gloomy," he cried; "things will be all right—in any case, one can always go back to Rangoon."

Then he proceeded to open the bottle. He poured out a glass for her, which she hardly touched, while he, with marvellous celerity, finished the whole. After which, it struck her that his enunciation grew unaccountably thick.

Two hours later, when she passed through the hall on her way out, he lay snoring heavily in the arm-chair. At midnight he was still there.

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A month later he had changed his last five-pound note, and they both stood face to face with that grim spectre called Ruin. The last quarter's rent in the Temple was long overdue; bills—very small ones, it's true—came trooping in. There seemed not the smallest ray of daylight anywhere. The twelve months of miserable battling was at an end; Fate, or whatever else it was, seemed completely opposed to them. To her it appeared almost vain to struggle against the current any longer; they had not succeeded in stemming Fortune's full tide even for a brief space; they had simply passed from one failure to another; and, breast with what fierce courage you may the rough waves as they break over you, the end is still inevitable.

"The only thing to do is to ask the old man to pay your passage back to Rangoon," she said to him one day when things were blacker than ever.

"It seems the only thing possible," he muttered. He was honestly and sincerely sorry to leave England—that much is certain—and keenly alive to the painful fact that he had met with no success.

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CHAPTER XVII

THAT night he wrote to his father's City agents, asking them to communicate with Akyab. Two days later the answer came, and the old man's anger was unmistakably shown in the terms of the reply. Yes; he was willing to forward sixty pound—fifty pounds to be paid over for passage out by the agents; on no account was it to be given to Moung Gyaw; the remaining ten pounds to go for expenses out. Mrs Moung Gyaw was not even mentioned; in fact, she might never have existed.

"His trust is not flattering," he remarked, after he had read the letter.

"No," she agreed; "he is angry about the house, and quite justly so. You made a great mistake, and one for which I, of course, get the blame."

It did not take any undue amount of shrewdness to know that all the onus of it had long ago been apportioned to her.

"It's done now," he muttered.

"I know, but the folly remains." To which he made no reply.

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"What will *you* do if I go?" he asked, looking at her.

"I? Oh! I suppose mother will have me at home until you can afford to have me out."

He seemed relieved.

His preparations took but a very few days, and in a fortnight he was ready to start.

Late, on the last night, he sought her in her room.

"I fear," he began, "that I have not been always nice to you." He paused, expecting some word from her.

"No one is always nice," she replied evasively. She shrank from any recrimination on the eve of what promised to be a long separation.

"I am sorry," he pursued, "if you should feel that I have *quite* failed as a husband."

"Why this self-repentant mood?" she asked.

"Because my conscience reproaches me." He played nervously with the hair-brushes on her table.

"I thought yours was far too well bred to intrude without invitation; but let us not go over the old ground. Let us think of the future. What is gone, is gone. Come and sit over here," she continued kindly, in the same tone that she would have used to an acquaintance.

He obeyed her.

"How long do you think it will take to work up the practice again?" she enquired presently.

"I do not know," he answered, "but if I can get Kywin Thwl, the old clerk, back, it will not take very long. The Burmans trust me, and that is much."

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"They are good judges," she went on. "You are a fine lawyer." As indeed he was. "If only," she continued, "you had less timidity, there would be no one to touch you."

"It is my nature to be gentle," he replied.

"I don't think gentleness answers in a man," she remarked slowly, "especially in dealing with the white people in Burmah; they misconstrue it, and gentleness is not the name that they give to it."

"Let us avoid all the English next time," he suggested, ignoring her last remark.

"You may be sure that I shall not court them," she replied, and she shivered a little, remembering many incidents.

"Where will you stay when you arrive?" she enquired after a pause.

"I hardly know; I shall have no money; probably with Chundera."

"I don't envy you."

"You never liked him, but he is a good fellow, and will be very useful."

"I wish I could leave you something to-morrow," he continued, "but I can't."

"That does not matter," she interposed quickly; "but you can do one thing much more important, if you will." She glanced at him earnestly.

"What is that?" he enquired.

"Promise me to limit yourself to two whisky-and-sodas in a day, however much you may want more."

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There was a slight pause, broken only by the bells of a passing hansom.

"I promise," he answered.

"Solemnly?" she asked, and she held out her hand in confirmation.

"Solemnly," he echoed, and clasped her fingers tightly in his. She smiled a little then, and they sat on in silence for awhile, each busy with many thoughts.

Then the clock struck the quarter after twelve, and he yawned and rose to his feet.

"Are you going?" she asked.

He misinterpreted her meaning.

"I should like to stay—but"—he hesitated—"the fact is, I am very ill—it would not be fair." He gazed at her with ashamed and reawakened tenderness. The words conveyed nothing of their real meaning to his wife. That was to come with other evil knowledge later on.

"You understand?" he asked; "and you are not angry?"

She was sensible of a feeling of annoyance and disgust strongly on her, seeing that, for many months past, he had at all times avoided her society, and shown in numerous instances his weariness. It argued considerable vanity on his part to imagine that she would give him an invitation to linger by her side now.

"I understand that it is past the time for you to bid me good-night," she said coldly, and she also yawned with unmistakable fatigue.

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"Good-night," he said, and he bent and kissed her. A moment later she was alone.

"I wonder what he meant about being ill?" she thought as she undressed; "he does not look ill. I wish he had not thought that I wished him to stay with me—because I never want him, never."

Half an hour later she had fallen into a tranquil, dreamless sleep, such an one as had long been a stranger to her—a slumber such as only follows on the lifting of a burden, the relaxing of great tension.

By noon on the morrow he was well on his way to Paris, and she was busy packing up, in preparation for a tenant who had taken the house furnished for six months.

A great part of the day went in burning old correspondence and papers, and getting rid of all useless lumber.

One box in particular, containing many letters written by various people before and after her marriage, came in for especial attention. She took them out one by one; there was a faint odour of faded rose-leaves about them. She sighed a little: it was strangely emblematic of many a dead hope, many a lost illusion. On top of all lay a long and eloquent appeal from her father, urging her not to marry. The tears started to her eyes as she saw it now. Underneath was a note from her mother in favour of it; well, she had always loved her mother best, and never doubted her wisdom, save once, either for here or hereafter. Still, she did not

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care to read the written words, so she destroyed them slowly along with many others.

One note alone that was quite at the bottom she read, and laid tenderly aside.

To the writer, her welfare at one time had been over-dear—in fact, without any vanity, she felt that her life and her story would always be of vital interest to him. She took up the letter now, and went through it slowly twice, and acknowledged, perhaps for the first time, the justness of it. It had been written three weeks before her wedding-day, and this is what it said :—

"*June* 30, 18—.

"Your letter and its news have pained and disturbed me much.

"It is true that under no circumstances, as you well know, could I hear of your approaching marriage without sorrow; but about this, my dear, what can I say? You are so young, and so unversed in the ways of the world, especially that world that lies out in the East, which I know so well and love so little. You can have no conception of what you do in allying yourself with a native. Mind, I am not prejudiced against Mr Moung Gyaw. He may be, and I am sure is, all that you say, but I have seen so many marriages between white and brown, and never—no, *never*, has the result been happy.

"I do not wish to preach to you, nor even to give advice, which you have not sought and do not want,

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but I would implore of you—you who are charming above all women—to pause well and long before you take so irrevocable a step. Let no consideration for others, sentimental or otherwise, sway you either. There are times in one's life when one should think only of oneself. You, I know, will shake your dear head when you read this; nevertheless it is the truth.

"I, who am thinking of you always, desire only one thing: that in the far days to come your life should be as free from sorrow as it has been hitherto.

"Between the lines of your letter I see hesitation and some doubt. Oh, my child, my dear, be wise in time! The world is all before you; do not take any false or hasty step on its very threshold.

"The gods are seldom forgiving, believe me; and if we refuse their guidance when they desire to do us good, they are apt to leave us for ever after.

"And now, dear, good-bye! Think a little on what I have said here, and remember always that I am your friend—a real friend who will serve you with heart and hand at all times, at all places, and deem it reward amply sufficient that you accept the service.—Yours while he lives, E. B."

She sat long with the thin faded paper in her hand, thinking on its contents.

How well he had known! How truly he had prophesied!

The following day Mrs Moung Gyaw had taken up

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her residence with her parents, and with them she remained for close on twelve months. It was a peaceful interlude in her life, and one to which she often afterwards looked back with pleasure. Still, it had its drawbacks. For instance, being kept without any allowance whatsoever was very galling, especially for one from whom so much somehow was always expected. So many people persisted in believing that she had married a rich man. This supposition she was aware of, and it deepened her sense of dependence and humiliation. Fortunately, however, she had both courage and resignation in her character, and she needed them.

Moung Gyaw wrote every week; things seemed to be going well with him. He had got his practice back, and he hoped soon to send her her passage-money. That was invariably the burden of the mail. Of details, or of people, he said nothing.

So the winter passed by, and in May he wired a hundred pounds, and told her to get an outfit and come quickly. He wrote affectionately, and amongst other things he said:—

"I shall do everything in my power to make you happy this time.

"We have both suffered greatly, but I hope that, being wiser, I may have grown also better. Of that you shall be the judge. Will you try and blot out the past from your remembrance?

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"What you have lost I know that I am powerless to render back, but in much I can, and will, repay. Will you come to me, my wife? Will your tenderness, your indulgence, extend to absolve me in many things?"

It was a nice letter, and one of which she never doubted the sincerity. A lily of sentiment and of hope seemed to grow up in her heart. After all, perhaps their life together would be as once she had hoped. Time, the adjuster, brought much of wisdom to people. Perhaps she had been over-exacting at first; perhaps—— She paused; suddenly she remembered many things that she wished she could forget. But still, possibly she had been harsh—sometimes. However, they would open the book of the future together.

. . . . . .

It was six o'clock on a Sunday morning in early July that *The Lancashire Witch*, after a stormy and perilous voyage, passed the pilot brig, and steamed slowly up the river to Rangoon.

The rain was pouring steadily down, and the whole country, even to the lofty Shway Dagone Pagoda, was shrouded in a damp white fog. The decks were running in water, and quite deserted. The few passengers aboard—it is not the time of year to travel—were busy putting the last touches to their luggage. The heat was very great, and the river, swollen and yellow from wandering over miles of alluvial mud, parted sullenly on either side of the steamer. There

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were a few sampans, with wet, bedraggled-looking Burmans in them, otherwise only a few ships at anchor. There was no river traffic, because the tide was running up. Presently the engine-bell rang, and there followed that sudden stoppage and silence so familiar to those who go down to the sea in ships.

Mrs Moung Gyaw, looking out of the port-hole, realised that they were abreast of Rangoon town—a study in greys and greens, tempered by red dust, in the damp, depressing atmosphere. Still, she felt very glad to have arrived. On the shore stood a few ticca gharris sheltering under the trees; otherwise, there seemed no one stirring. On deck, however, there was the sound of many voices, hurrying feet, and the grinding of the winch. She locked her dressing-bag, and then looked around to see if anything had been forgotten. The steward knocked at the door; he came to tell her that a steam launch had already put out, with Mr Moung Gyaw on board.

She put on her topee. Her heart beat faster, and her hand trembled. She had great hopes, but few doubts. She had made many resolutions, which she meant to keep. She would do her best to adapt herself more to circumstances. She would be more forgiving, less unkind. She was older and wiser now. Many things that had at one time seemed so hard were now but part of the whole.

She hesitated for a few moments to steady her nerves. When a few seconds later she opened the cabin door,

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she found herself face to face with her husband. Just behind was his clerk, who salaamed respectfully. Moung Gyaw entered the cabin and took her hands in his.

"I am so glad!" he said simply.

She said nothing; she was too surprised at the extraordinary change in his appearance to be able to say anything in greeting. He, who had always been so slim, was now a big, flabby, fat man, with a double, pendulous chin and yellow bloodshot eyes. He wore an unbecoming and badly-fitting green flannel suit, and a shabby topee streaked with rain. She was shaken by the change in his appearance as a tree is in a hurricane.

"You wonder to see me grown so stout?" he observed, in reply to her glance of surprise.

"I do indeed," she answered. "What has caused it?"

He shook his head. "I think we had better go," he said abruptly; and the clerk, at a sign from his master, entered the cabin and took her bag.

"I am quite ready," she replied.

"I was lucky to get a steam launch," he remarked, as they reached the deck, indicating the puffing, snorting craft that heaved up and down at the ship's side.

Mrs Moung Gyaw made a careful descent of the slippery companion ladder, Moung Gyaw and the clerk following. Once on board, the launch wheeled round and made rapidly for the shore, the rain falling and a hot breeze blowing all the way.

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"Are you at Keighley Street?" she asked him, as they stood together under the awning.

"No," he replied. "Didn't I tell you Chundera foreclosed on the mortgage some months ago? I have taken a bungalow out at Kokine, which I hope you will like."

"Oh, I'm sure to," she answered politely, and supposed it was the dull sky and the rain that made her feel so suddenly depressed.

"It's rather nice," he continued, "and stands high; the Jabberers used to live there. You remember Miss Jabberer, a pretty, dark girl?"

She nodded her head.

Just then the launch came alongside the white wooden jetty, and he helped her out. The clerk unfurled an umbrella, and they proceeded to where the gharri stood.

"This is our trap," Moung Gyaw said, pointing to a small-sized black tum-tum without any hood, that was drawn by a little pony, at whose head a thoroughly drenched and miserable-looking syce stood awaiting patiently their arrival.

"Will it hold us?" she asked doubtfully. She always disliked traps.

"Oh yes," he said, and he produced two mackintoshes from under the seat. When they had got in, Moung Gyaw gathered up the reins, the syce jumped up behind and held an umbrella over them, and so they started on their long drive through the rain-washed empty streets out to Kokine. The pony trotted patiently

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on; he had one loose shoe that click-clacked constantly, while the tum-tum, being of the commonest possible construction, jolted and rocked to and fro in the most uncomfortable fashion. The water ran in two rivulets down the back of her neck, and soaked the mackintosh apron that covered their knees. They were thoroughly wet through long before they turned in at the open gate of Palm Crest, as the house was named, and Moung Gyaw drew up just beside the stable. In front of them was a great flight of stone steps, while to the left stretched a carriage drive.

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CHAPTER XVIII

"We must walk up," he exclaimed, putting the whip in its socket; "the drive is too dangerous." Then he got down and helped her out, and they waded along the muddy path and ascended the steps, which were overgrown with green slime, making the foothold by no means secure; the stairs numbered four flights, and led up to a plateau, on which stood a very old, dark, and badly-built bungalow, much stained with damp and dirt.

She paused to gain breath before following Moung Gyaw within, noting, against her will, what an air of neglect and desertion the whole place wore.

"Have you been here long?" she asked him, releasing herself from the dripping waterproof.

"About a fortnight," he answered.

They entered through the open door, and she saw two bare rooms with concrete floors, some shabby cane chairs, and a table huddled up in one corner, and a worm-eaten punkah in the other. There was no sign of any one having lived in the place. Her heart sank a little.

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"Will you come to your room?" he said; "this is rather cheerless." And he led the way up an uncarpeted stairway to a long square room overhead, with only one chair in it, on which stood an empty glass. Two bedrooms opened out of this into hers, which was small and hot. There was some worn matting on the floor, an almirah, one chair, and a broken-down-looking bed of brass; the windows were devoid of curtains, so also were the doors.

She sighed as she looked round; it was all so shabby and comfortless. He followed her in.

"You have not said you were glad to see me," he said.

"I have not had time," she replied, removing her gloves. He came closer, and took her in his arms.

"I know that I am delighted," he murmured tenderly, and then he kissed her.

She recoiled hastily. He smelt so strongly of brandy, it made her feel sick.

"You do not care for me," he remarked, with an offended air.

"Oh yes, I do," she interposed, choking down the feeling of unaccountable disgust with which his touch and his gross presence filled her. "Only—only, I am tired, and I should like to rest."

"Will you come and sit out here?" he said, and he went in search of a chair for her.

Left alone, she gazed slowly round, and felt as if she could cry; then, putting such weakness away from

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her, she passed into the outer room, and when he reappeared, she was awaiting him with as bright an expression as she could command. Following him came an extremely dirty-looking Madrasse boy in a red turban, carrying a champagne bottle, two glasses, and some biscuits.

"Where is the khansamah?" she enquired in a disappointed tone.

"Oh, he left some time ago; this is Ginger, he cooks and waits."

"He looks like it," she remarked, gazing at him.

"Plenty work doing, marm," the boy said apologetically.

"I want you to drink a glass of champagne," exclaimed Moung Gyaw, as Ginger poured it out, "in honour of the day. Besides, I don't know when we'll get any breakfast; Ginger is only just now going to the bazaar."

"It would be cooler for the memsahib outside," Ginger remarked, and, in obedience to his suggestion, the chairs were moved on to a stone verandah overlooking the back of the compound, which was in a small degree cooler. Ginger let down four torn green chics to keep out the wet, and then left them.

"I am sorry the khansamah left," she observed as soon as they were alone. "That is such a very common servant."

"He's a smart chap, and suits me very well," Moung

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Gyaw said, putting his feet up on the leg-rests of the chair.

"Why did the khansamah go? he promised me he would always come back," she enquired anxiously.

"So he did, so he did; and then one day I had the Rooneys out here, and we had roast suckling pig for dinner, and he refused to serve it, so I kicked him out."

"Do you know the Rooneys?" she exclaimed in surprise, ignoring the rest of his sentence.

"Oh yes; rather well within the last six months. They are very kind, and I like them."

"They are very vulgar, aren't they? At least, we always heard so."

He hesitated; then he answered:

"She drinks rather hard occasionally, but she is very good-natured: would do anything for anybody. The daughter, Daisy, is coming home shortly: a nice little girl. She's not really Mrs Rooney's child, but she is his by Mrs Rooney's sister, so the tale goes."

"Does she drink too?"

"Oh no, she is only a schoolgirl, not yet sixteen, and they are devoted to her."

"How is your practice?" she asked, not feeling very interested in the Rooneys.

"Oh, it's wonderfully good," he said.

"I am afraid having to send my passage-money must have been rather a drag."

"Oh, I had to borrow that," he replied. "I couldn't get together so much at one time."

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She was silent. The word "borrow" chilled her.

He was busy taking off his shoes and stockings. The rain sounded heavily on the roof.

"Will you have some more champagne?" he asked.

"No, thanks," she replied; "no more." Then she looked at him curiously as he poured out the rest and drank it off, with what was, unquestionably, a shaky hand. Her heart contracted with a vague suspicion, something that she hardly dare breathe to herself.

"I shall be back in five minutes," he said, and he rose and went to his room. When he reappeared, he had changed into a shabby silk loonygee, much too small for him, and a Chinese jacket open in front, displaying a very hairy and much-tattooed chest. He threw himself in the long chair, exclaiming, "That's more comfortable," and began to shake his bare legs and feet to and fro in the way that she recalled so well. She made no remark on that score, but asked a few questions about old acquaintances.

Presently the matey was seen to emerge from the cook-house, whereupon Moung Gyaw shouted to him to bring up the brandy.

"Surely you are not going to have brandy after champagne?" she cried in astonishment.

"Oh yes, I am," he replied. "I always drink brandy now."

"That is what has made you so stout; it's very fattening, and very bad for the liver," his wife answered.

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"Maybe; but it agrees with me," was his retort, still shaking his dark legs to and fro.

Just then, the matey wriggled awkwardly through the door, carrying a bottle and a glass; his bright, beady eyes glanced curiously from one to the other as he did so.

As soon as he had deposited the bottle and disappeared, Moung Gyaw helped himself hastily, gulping down a sherry glass of the spirit neat. His wife watched him in alarm.

"It's so bad for you, Moung," she cried in genuine distress.

"It's nothing of the kind," he retorted. "I know my own constitution best," and he poured himself out another glass.

"I cannot allow you to have any more," she exclaimed. She stretched over for the bottle, and seizing it, carried it into her room, with the idea of hiding it, but he followed her, and closed the door behind him. His face was flushed a dusky blood-red.

"I am sorry," he murmured. "If you love me, I'll be good," and he lurched forward and took her into his arms. His yellow eyes sought hers with a glance of tipsy affection. His breath, warm and smelling of drink, fanned her cheek.

"I can't," she cried; "I can't," struggling to get free. "I cannot care for you unless you give up drinking."

She closed her eyes. It was all too hateful, too outrageous. She wished that she might die.

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"What have you been doing with yourself this last year?" she demanded some two days later, determined to get the truth from his own lips, if possible.

He looked at her, and then he looked away. He was uncertain what to do. Then at length he said:

"Would you like to know? And if I tell you, you won't blame, or——?"

"No; I will not utter one word of reproach," she assured him.

"Well," he answered, "I broke my promise to you, as you know." After all, to keep a promise is the folly of civilisation; these dusky mortals know better.

She bowed her head.

"Yes," she murmured.

"I broke it almost from the first. I have been drinking steadily ever since."

Her face blanched, her courage wavered.

"But you will give it up now?"

"I shall try to," he replied earnestly.

"But you must, you must!" she cried. "It is too dreadful; it will kill your brain, ruin your health, your future."

His face grew very serious; her words seemed to have struck home.

"I know it," he answered sadly. "My head so often feels dazed, and I seem to see things as through a mist. It is an odious habit."

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"But only a habit with you," she exclaimed, "and so quite easily dropped."

He was silent for a moment; then he looked at her. Then in a low voice he said:

"I will give up brandy first, that's the most insidious of all. You must keep it from me." He spoke confidently: she would give her strength to him, of that he felt sure. And for the moment he was quite sincere in what he said.

"I will try my very best," she answered gently. Then she glanced at him, and the tears rose to her eyes. Everything else faded from her memory. It was her mission to win him, and she would not shrink from it. She knew that it might not prove easy, but she was not deterred. No more was said then.

For one month from that time he kept absolutely sober, with the consequence that he lost much of the unhealthy flesh from about his throat and face; his eyes grew clear, his hand steady, his brain active. In short, he was a changed man, and she was delighted. She had hardly hoped for so complete a transformation in so brief a time. Life once more held hope.

The news spread rapidly amongst the servants, and so to others. The clients, who had grown nervous, returned to the office. People said that evidently it had only been a passing phase with him, due possibly to loneliness; that now his wife was with him, all would be well. Meantime, Mrs Moung Gyaw had dismissed the objectionable Ginger, who, she soon

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discovered—amongst minor vices—drank as if he had as many mouths as the Ganges. In his place she installed the old Mussulman khansamah, who in a very short space of time put the bungalow in order.

The chairs were cleaned, the floors newly polished, some curtains put up, and every vase filled with flowers. Not that anything could have made the place look really well. It was too damp and dark, and from the floor being level with the ground, the drawing- and dining-rooms were infested with toads and scorpions, which hardly added to the pleasure of sitting there.

Before she had been a fortnight back, Moung Gyaw bought a carriage and a pair of country-breds, so that they were able to take long drives together, greatly relieving the monotony of the day; and on Sunday they took their luncheon, and remained out till night-fall. So the first four weeks went rapidly by. As yet, no one had disturbed their solitude; even the Rooneys, with a delicacy hardly to have been expected, refrained from intruding on a couple who had been so long separated.

On the fifth Sunday after her arrival they had planned an excursion to the second Dāk bungalow, some twenty-one miles out, when one of their ponies cast its shoe, and made their going impossible.

Moung Gyaw passed the day engaged on the first chapter of a law-book he was writing, and in the evening, it being quite fine, he proposed driving to the Literary Society to see the papers. It never occurred

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to her that the Rooneys' bungalow was situated exactly opposite the library. Had she done so, she would have driven in the opposite direction. She had a lurking dread of his renewing his acquaintance there, for she guessed—and the guess was very near the truth—that in much he owed his late indiscretions to their society. She feared its attraction again, such as it was, on a spirit so weak and wavering as his. For her own part, she had not the slightest desire to make Mrs Rooney's acquaintance; she had heard too many tales of that lady to feel in any way attracted to approach closer.

"I think we will drop in at the gymkhana for a moment first," Moung Gyaw remarked, as the gharri rolled out of the gates.

"But you are not a member," she observed.

"Oh yes, I am; they elected me some months ago."

"What! after black-balling you before?"

"Oh yes. I was thinking of you when I sought election; it's some place to go of an evening."

"I am sorry you should have thought of me in that way, because I shall never go there," she said. "They wouldn't have me when I wanted to go, now they can't have me."

"That is very absurd," he retorted.

"Perhaps—at any rate, it's how I feel; so, if you don't mind, we won't go there." A request to which he acceded with ill grace.

About an hour later, when they had looked through all the illustrated papers and magazines at the Literary

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Society, a very heavy rain and thunder-storm suddenly came on.

"We can't very well drive home in this," Moung Gyaw remarked, as they stood in the covered verandah and watched the vivid lightning flashing across the dark and saturated compound.

"It wouldn't be pleasant, certainly," she admitted; "it is so far to go."

"Let us go across to the Rooneys' till it is over," he suggested tentatively. "They are at home," he added; "you can see the lamps are full on."

She hesitated. It seemed to her a step in the wrong direction. She had that fleeting premonition which none of us is justified in disregarding, and in so doing, I always think she was responsible in a way for what came after.

Three minutes later they had crossed the slushy road and were walking up the drive to Mrs Rooney's bungalow. That lady, being early apprised by the boy of their advent, popped her head out of the window and shouted a hearty greeting; while Mr Rooney, resplendent in a blazer of wonderful hues, came running downstairs, and nearly wrung Mrs Moung Gyaw's hand off in the eagerness of his welcome.

Poor, simple, good-hearted Jack Rooney, peace be to your ashes! Best of friends, most generous of foes!

Talking in what later Mrs Moung Gyaw got to know as his usual cheery, breezy, noisy fashion, Mr Rooney

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conducted his guests upstairs, where his wife awaited them.

Mrs Rooney was attired in a sort of white overall, somewhat in the style of a nightdress, and had her hair brushed back lightly from a very white low brow. But what struck Mrs Moung Gyaw with surprise was the shortness of her stature. Seen in a carriage, she gave the impression of being tall; nevertheless, neither that, nor her extraordinary breadth, in any way detracted from—nay, they rather accentuated—her good looks. To a perfectly clear cream skin and scarlet lips add eyes of a light brown, particularly bright and sparkling, and toning well with nut-brown hair. Mrs Rooney was on the shady side of thirty, but what a pleasant shade it was, illumined by the sweetest of smiles and the kindest of hearts! It was never until Mrs Rooney had taken too much to drink that her strong innate coarseness began to make itself disagreeably felt; and once the jarring note sounded, it was a long and painful one, tingling through one's every nerve.

If I have lingered over-long with Mrs Rooney, it is because in this story she plays a prominent part; truth to tell, she is playing it still.

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CHAPTER XIX

WHEN Mrs Moung Gyaw had been given the best chair in the place, which Mrs Rooney first carefully dusted with the tail of her gown, she was enabled in the conversational pauses to glance round at her surroundings. Linoleum covered the floor, and from it there rose a distinct odour of soap-suds: a thing so unusual in the East as to be far from unpleasant. They were seated in the verandah, which was certainly preferable to the drawing-room visible through white curtains, which, for uncompromising ugliness and incongruity, could not have been surpassed. Fortunately for sensitive people, it was an apartment reserved only for great and ceremonious occasions.

"I am sure Moung Gyaw is delighted to have you back," her hostess remarked with easy familiarity, when they had fully discussed the weather.

"That he is, I'll bet," joined in her husband, at the same time giving Moung Gyaw a resounding slap on the back, accompanied by a loud guffaw. It was commonly said that, when Jack Rooney laughed, the doors and windows flew open.

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"I shan't let her go away any more," Moung Gyaw said when he had recovered his breath.

"No, you keep her here; she is a long way too young to be trapesing round by herself. I know what men are!" Mrs Rooney cried, and coupled this dark saying by a significant look at "her Jack," as she used to call him, who, however, was too busy mixing whisky and soda to be aware of it.

"Jack, where's your manners? ladies first," screamed his spouse, as he proceeded to hand a drink to Moung Gyaw and take one for himself.

"Not for me, thanks," hastily interposed Mrs Moung Gyaw, shaking her head.

"I won't say no, anyhow; I haven't had a sup to-day," exclaimed Mrs Rooney, as she held out an expectant and extremely well-shaped hand.

"No, Jack; brandy, not whisky, for me," she directed, as he was preparing to pour out the latter.

"It isn't good for you, Annie," he protested meekly.

"Never mind what's good for me; give me what I like," was her philosophic reply.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Tell her it's bad for her, Moung Gyaw; you have more influence," he whispered.

But Moung Gyaw shook his head.

"I won't interfere," he said.

Mr Rooney said no more, but gave her a dusky-complexioned brandy-and-soda, which was gulped

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gratefully down; after which, Mrs Rooney proceeded to wipe her face and forehead and neck with much energy.

"Lord, how I do perspire!" she said to Mrs Moung Gyaw, at the same time glancing at the handkerchief for any tangible evidence of its labour.

Mrs Moung Gyaw laughed a little.

"It agrees with you, evidently," she remarked.

Mrs Rooney was so unaffectedly vulgar, that it was impossible not to feel amused.

"I am glad you think so," she exclaimed heartily. "I've been in the beastly place nearly eighteen years."

"Have you never been home?" Mrs Moung Gyaw said, thinking how kindly the climate had treated her.

"No, never once. I come from Australia." [The lady pronounced it Austryla.] "I've never seen Europe; neither has Jack. He was born on a convict ship, when his father was transported."

"That's right!" he called out from where he sat talking to Moung Gyaw; "ain't ashamed of it, either."

"Naturally not; why should you?" asked Mrs Moung Gyaw, looking in his direction.

"No, there's no flies on Jack Rooney," he assented, evidently pleased.

"There will be on your wife soon, if you don't give her another drink," observed his spouse, holding out her glass.

He rose and took it from her.

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"Can't she swallow?" he asked Mrs Moung Gyaw, with an air of a person inviting her to pronounce on some rare talent in another.

Mrs Rooney, however, was tactful enough to come to the rescue.

"Yes, she can," she agreed, "and she ain't ashamed of it neither."

"You'll have to draw it mild when Daisy comes home," he said. "Daisy is our little daughter," he continued, in explanation to his guest, "and a prettier or a cleverer——"

"Oh, shut up!" said his wife, forcibly checking her husband's eloquence; but Mrs Moung Gyaw noticed that the extraordinary softness that had suddenly dawned across his red face at the girl's name lingered there for some time after.

"Oh, she's a nice little thing," Mrs Rooney conceded after a pause, when Jack was once more deep in conversation with Moung Gyaw, "and I'm very fond of her; but Jack—why, Jack's a fool!"

"Is she coming home for good?" her visitor asked, feeling that it was incumbent upon her to show some interest.

"Oh yes! She is only sixteen, but Jack wants a companion to go out with him of a morning and an evening. Daisy is just the one. Since I have got so stout, you know, I don't care to go about so much; besides, there's plenty to be done at home. I always help with the cooking and the cleaning."

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"Really?" her listener murmured courteously.

"Besides," pursued Mrs Rooney, "Rangoon is not what it used to be; it's grown so much larger, and the people put on any amount of side, which don't suit me."

"It is a big place certainly," agreed Mrs Moung Gyaw, "and the inhabitants might easily be improved on."

"You are right," Mrs Rooney rejoined emphatically. Then she asked somewhat abruptly: "Are you fond of animals?"

"Yes, very," was the prompt reply.

"Then what do you think of my cockatoo?" she said, drawing her visitor's attention to a handsome lemon-crested bird swinging in a large ring. "You are a funny bird, aren't you, Cocky?" and she put her head on one side and glanced affectionately at him for confirmation of her statement. "Do you know," she continued, bringing her glance back to Mrs Moung Gyaw, "he won't speak to Jack or me for days after we have been drunk." Mrs Rooney shook with amusement as she made this announcement.

"Really, how extraordinary!" Mrs Moung Gyaw remarked, not knowing very well what to say in response to so embarrassing a confidence. Then she rose and went over and stroked and spoke to the bird, while her hostess said peremptorily:

"Jack, another peg, please."

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"I think we must be going," Mrs Moung Gyaw suggested, returning to where her hostess sat.

"Oh, you'll stay and take pot luck, same as Moung Gyaw always used to," Mrs Rooney declared hospitably.

"Of course they will," echoed her husband, taking another drink on the strength of it.

"I'm afraid not to-night, thank you very much," her guest answered quite firmly.

"Go on, Moung Gyaw; make her say yes," Mrs Rooney cried, at the same time looking over the rim of her glass authoritatively.

"I think not," he replied, perceiving that his wife did not care to; also, perhaps, to some extent realising that, good-hearted as the Rooneys were, their house and society was hardly her setting.

"All right, if you won't, you won't; only come when you like, everything is free-and-easy here"; and Mrs Rooney struggled out of her chair, shook hands, and toddled over to the staircase and watched her guests descend.

"Good-bye!" she cried; "come back soon, and always come early and stay late."

"Thanks very much," murmured Mrs Moung Gyaw civilly.

"I don't want any thanks; you are always welcome. I'll tell you what——"

The latter part of the sentence was lost in the noise of the wheels of their carriage, into which Mrs Moung Gyaw got with considerable alacrity.

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Mr Rooney helped her in, and then leant over and once more clasped her hand till she winced—in fact, her fingers tingled for an hour afterwards.

"Free-and-easy!" truly they were that. Mrs Moung Gyaw felt that, little as she loved conventionality or stiffness, some of the decorous reserve observable elsewhere might with advantage have just leavened things at the Rooneys'.

"How do you like her?" Moung Gyaw enquired as they went homewards.

His wife did not reply just at first; then she said thoughtfully:

"I'm sure she has a heart of gold, but she is just a little impossible."

"She is vulgar," he agreed, ashamed to admit that that vulgarity had a charm for him; "but she is extraordinarily kind, especially in illness."

"Of that I am sure. Did you go there often?"

"Oh! not so very often."

"How could you stand it?" she asked in surprise, remembering how hypercritical he had been so often in England about friends or acquaintances of hers.

"There was no other place to go. The English don't look at me when you are not here, and one is lonely. I like her and him very much," he pursued, "but when she is drunk—I hate her," he added, with a sudden burst of confidence.

"Why?" She felt somewhat interested.

"Because she becomes the exact opposite of what

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she is when sober, excepting only that she does not grow any more refined."

"Does she often get that way?"

"She has bouts that last ten days or so; and, when the atmosphere gets too sultry, Jack goes for a change to the pilot brig. You know she grows excessively amorous on those occasions. In fact, ordinarily you may take it that it is a bad sign when she commences to address him as darling."

"OH!" The interjection was comprehensive.

"Yes; it's usually the prelude to the hurling of a decanter at his head!" he pursued with an unusual frankness.

"How dreadful! and what a pity! it's astonishing that she has kept her appearance," Mrs Moung Gyaw exclaimed disjointedly.

"It's all gone to make flesh instead of spoiling her complexion," he replied, adding: "After all, in figure she is almost a deformity."

"She is very stout certainly, and seems to have great difficulty in walking." Just then they reached home, and the subject was dropped.

The following afternoon, Mrs Rooney, resplendent in her barouche, returned Mrs Moung Gyaw's call. She wore a holland coat and skirt, and a huge black velvet hat smothered in uncurled feathers. She was apparently quite on her best behaviour, declined all refreshment, stayed barely twenty minutes, and conducted herself throughout with a mingled air of stiffness

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and patronising haughtiness so different to the night before, as to be infinitely diverting to her hostess. Finally, with a gracious wave of her hand, she made a most dignified exit, evidently well pleased with this acquittal of her social obligations.

"We must invite them to dinner," Moung Gyaw said, when he heard of the visit. "They have given me so many."

"I have no objection," his wife replied; "but whom on earth can we ask to meet them?"

"That's rather puzzling," he admitted; "not that I think they would care for people."

"Still, we must have some one."

"Would you mind if I asked Flagram?" he asked, after a few seconds' thought.

"Who is he?"

"An Armenian—a friend of theirs."

"Is he table-broken?—that's all I ask."

"Oh yes, he's not a bad sort—a bit greasy, that's all."

"Very well, when shall it be?" She spoke with an air of resignation.

"Saturday, I think, as I need not go out early on Sunday."

"That sounds ominous."

So it was arranged. Much against her better sense, Mrs Moung Gyaw wrote an invitation that included Daisy, who was due to arrive two days later.

"What shall we give them for dinner?" she asked

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Moung Gyaw the night before. "I thought thick and clear soup, some fried fish, saddle of mutton, savoury, and an ice; will that do?" She looked at him.

He was reading the evening paper in a long chair, while the cook crouched in the doorway, waiting for orders and bazaar money.

"I'm afraid not," he replied, looking up; "Mrs R. likes something more solid."

"What can be more solid than a saddle of mutton?"

"Yes, I know, but that would not be her style."

"Will you say what you think would be her style?"

"Shall I give you an idea of the dinners SHE gives?" he asked.

"Yes, that will be best," she agreed.

"Well, last time I dined there we had soup—no fish —some sausages"—his wife could not repress a slight shudder—"a rumpsteak pudding, a roast goose, and some fruit out of a tin."

"I wonder you are alive!"

"It *was* a bit heavy," he answered; "but those are always the kind of meals they have."

"I shall adhere to the saddle," she remarked in conclusion; "after all, one must consider one's own interior."

The following morning Mrs Rooney's matey arrived carrying a live goose, with the memsahib's compliments; also a tin of Australian plums, and another of apples to make sauce.

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The goose was slaughtered early by Moung Gyaw's orders, while he said, with no particular enthusiasm:

"We had better have some champagne"; adding: "Champagne is a treat to them, they cannot often afford it."

"I hope the lady can do with something less than a bath of it," his wife said.

"She'll have to," Moung Gyaw rejoined.

When Mrs Moung Gyaw was dressing at half-past seven that evening, the Rooneys arrived. The lady drove up alone in her carriage, and whistled to announce her coming; Mr Rooney and the daughter following later in his tum-tum, by which time their hostess had come downstairs. It was evident at a glance that Mrs Rooney had decided to put aside all ceremony. She was seated in a low chair with a gin-and-bitters in her hand, which she had ordered to while away the time.

"I hope you don't mind?" she said.

"Not at all," was the reply; and then Mrs Moung Gyaw looked at her guest, whose dress consisted of a kimono which had once been a theatrical property and showed it. It was bound round below her waist by a girdle; her hair, done in classic style, was enclosed in a brass fillet. This union of the Greek and Japanese had, at least, the merits of originality, the lady being quite oblivious of any incongruity herself.

Mr Rooney was well oiled, but slightly ill at ease in the unaccustomed confinement of evening-clothes;

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behind him came Daisy—sweet simplicity in pink muslin—a slim, unformed girl, with fair complexion and golden hair and small light eyes, who showed at every point her lack of breeding. She came shyly forward when her father introduced her. That he was her father there could be no doubt, and that Mrs Rooney was not her mother there could be no two opinions. Just at that moment Mr Flagram appeared in the doorway and entered unannounced. It is difficult to describe Mr Flagram; he was short and ponderous, and seemed to exude oil and vulgarity at every pore, added to which he had much good-nature and a comprehensive thirst. After shaking hands with his hostess, he addressed the Rooneys with:

"Hullo! here you are. Righto!"—a somewhat meagre salutation which seemed to afford the recipients intense satisfaction. Flagram's behaviour threatened to become offensively familiar.

"Will you have a sherry-and-bitters?" Mrs Moung Gyaw asked the newcomers, who replied, with a genial smile: "Rather!" Whereupon the khansamah, who was standing in the door, at a sign went to bring it, while Jack sat on the edge of the sofa and Daisy sidled into a cane chair. Presently Moung Gyaw appeared, whereupon the little circle seemed to expand still more happily. He nodded all round, and then busied himself mixing the drinks that had just been brought in; while Mrs Moung Gyaw crossed over and seated herself beside

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Miss Rooney, and commenced to talk to her in a friendly way, questioning her about her journey from India, and the convent set among the hills in Darjeeling, where the girl had spent the last five years. Mrs Moung Gyaw was most gracious, most kind, but Daisy Rooney was embarrassed and confused, and answered only in monosyllables and often at random; she hung her head and seemed to study the patterns of her mittens. Nevertheless, her hostess did not make the mistake of thinking her stupid.

A loud laugh from Mrs Rooney interrupted them. The girl started violently, and into her dull blue eyes there crept a look of apprehension, strongly dashed with dislike — two things that did not escape her companion.

"You are a darn funny fellow, Moung Gyaw," Mrs Rooney was heard to observe; "we'll have another drink to wash that down."

Moung Gyaw frowned at this remark before his wife, especially when he himself was quite sober. Mrs Rooney's familiarity was not pleasing to him. He took no notice, but went over to where his wife sat.

"Be careful," he whispered, "and hurry dinner." Then he approached Daisy, whose face changed and softened surprisingly as he bent over her and said politely: "I hope Miss Daisy has not forgotten me," and he sat down in the chair vacated by his wife, and gradually Daisy became all animation.

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Meanwhile, Mrs Moung Gyaw sent word to the cook to serve dinner, whilst Mrs Rooney, ignoring Jack's feeble protest against another drink, was directing Mr Flagram as to the correct amount of bitters necessary to a glass of raw gin.

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CHAPTER XX

"KHANA hi!" announced the khansamah in his deep tones, and he looked sad as he announced it. Truth to tell, he grieved at such a descent in the social scale for his memsahib,—the sahib had long ceased to interest him.

Mr Flagram gave Mrs Rooney his arm to rise. She was in the best of spirits, and the stimulants as yet seemed only to have heightened the clearness of her skin and the lustre of her eye. They all passed into the next room and seated themselves at a round table, gay with flowers and glass and silver.

"Give me some sherry." It was Mrs Rooney who broke the short silence that prevailed while the soup was being despatched.

"Wait for the champagne," her host murmured insinuatingly.

"Yes, mother, do," Daisy supplemented with a pleading look.

Mrs Moung Gyaw made some trifling remark or other to Mr Rooney, who was imbibing his soup audibly, so

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as not to overhear the little altercation. She could have saved herself the trouble, had she only realised that Mrs Rooney had fairly started, and no persuasion would be powerful enough to arrest her course for that evening.

"I want some sherry. Surely I may have it?" This with a winning smile in the direction of her hostess.

"Certainly," the other answered courteously, and the sherry was brought.

"Your wife's kinder than you, Moung Gyaw," observed the lady, and she nodded triumphantly; then, pushing her soup plate into the middle of the table, she leant two elbows on to it.

"This is Daisy's first dinner-party," she explained, *a propos* of nothing, "but it won't be her last."

"That it won't!" cried her father, wiping his long golden moustache vigorously. Then they all laughed. Daisy blushed, and Mrs Moung Gyaw glanced from one to the other, endeavouring to ascertain where the joke lay. Then she turned to Mr Flagram.

"Is it long since you've been home?" she asked. It always flatters an Eurasian or an Armenian to speak to them of home.

"Yes," he answered, "I'm sorry to say it is; but I hope to go next year." Then she enquired how long he had been in Burmah, and from that they drifted to London, the theatres and picture-galleries; he was by no means ill-informed.

Once or twice, as dinner progressed and the cham-

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pagne circulated freely, she let her glance wander towards Mrs Rooney, who, after a helping of saddle of mutton, seemed to have lost all taste for further food, and sat in comparative silence gazing across at Daisy, who was prattling gaily, if somewhat inconsequently, to her host, who tossed off glass after glass of wine, and now and then laughed vacantly.

The hostess's heart beat apprehensively, but she continued to talk those careless nothings that are the armour of social life. Mr Rooney, who declined champagne, was kind in coming to the rescue. He made many enquiries about the Ireland that he hoped to see in the near future. Nevertheless, long before the ice puddings had made their entry, Mrs Rooney's face had assumed a dazed, wandering expression. She drank slowly, and continued to look vacantly from Moung Gyaw to Daisy, as if striving to follow the sense of what they were saying; then she helped herself to ice pudding, pouring chartreuse over it, and proceeded to carry it unsteadily to her lips. Mrs Moung Gyaw kept her eyes averted, but could not help noticing that Mr Rooney was growing restless. An uncomfortable silence supervened.

Daisy ate her ice hurriedly, and Moung Gyaw looked stupidly round, when suddenly a loud hiccough from Mrs Rooney broke the stillness, followed by another and another.

The hostess in confusion suggested iced water. Jack was unaffectedly wretched.

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"That's nothing," Mrs Rooney said thickly, putting her handkerchief up to her mouth; then, catching her husband's eye, she acquired a sudden accession of fierceness, and, with her hand clasped threateningly round a tumbler, shouted: "What are you looking at?"

"Nothing, pet, darling," he interposed hastily, and with his most conciliatory manner.

"Perhaps Mrs Rooney would like to go to the drawing-room?" Mrs Moung Gyaw suggested with what she thought was a happy inspiration.

Every one seemed relieved. Mr Flagram again assisted the lady to rise, and in passing her host's chair—he had kept his seat—she flung her arm around his neck, exclaiming: "I love you, Moung Gyaw." At the same time she glared across at Jack, and then, staggering through the beaded curtain into the drawing-room, tumbled into a chair. Mrs Moung Gyaw, following immediately, directed the punkah to be pulled vigorously, while Daisy glanced at some photographs with tears in her eyes.

Mrs Rooney continued to hiccough feebly and at intervals. In about ten minutes or so the passage of the air to and fro had considerably revived her, and she was able to make a few almost intelligible remarks. By the time the others came from the dining-room she was growing noisy again. It is not too much to say that her hostess's disgust and amazement passed all bounds. It was with much difficulty that she kept

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her repose sufficiently to enable her to talk with some show of interest to Daisy. Inwardly she blamed herself intensely for ever having acceded to her husband's request that they should be invited to dine; she vowed that it should never occur again, and she wondered when it would come to an end. She would ask Moung Gyaw to hurry their departure. But one glance at him as he entered put an end to all hope from there; immediately behind him stumbled his two guests.

"Moung Gyaw is sleepy, as usual; he must have his long chair," Mr Flagram cried, evidently well acquainted with his host's requirements; to which proposition Mr Rooney agreed, and the lady inclined her head in what was apparently intended for a consent. Entirely ignoring the presence of their hostess, they gave the order for a chair to be brought, and placing it near the door to catch any stray breeze, they watched Moung Gyaw cast himself sleepily into it, and in less time than it takes to write he had fallen into a loud slumber, while Mr Rooney and Mr Flagram went for a stroll in the compound.

"I think," Mrs Moung Gyaw said to Daisy, in the pauses of her husband's snores, "as they may be late, you had better let me send you home in the office gharri." The girl looked both relieved and grateful.

A quarter of an hour later Mrs Moung Gyaw had seen her drive off, while she herself returned wearily to the house, to find Moung Gyaw just reawakened, Mrs

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Rooney almost sober, and all with one accord clamouring for whisky-and-sodas. The boy brought in the great silver tray laden with different drinks and mineral waters. Less than an hour later Mrs Moung Gyaw, without a word of farewell, left them.

"No wonder," she thought with profound disgust; "no wonder that the Romans kept a drunken man on the premises to teach their children the hideousness of insobriety!"

She lay long awake—anger and contempt and sorrow fighting for mastery. It must have been close on three o'clock when the durwan half-dragged, half-carried Moung Gyaw to his room, and, without attempting to undress him, laid him down on the bed.

At nine o'clock he still slept heavily, while the dressing-boy, anticipating his waking wants, cut up many limes and covered them with salt—a proceeding which Mrs Moung Gyaw viewed with pain and curiosity.

At half-past ten o'clock, when she returned from her morning drive, she found him lying on the verandah feebly sucking the aforementioned limes; he looked very bad, and seemed somewhat ashamed.

"You are angry," he ventured to commence, turning his eyes full on her.

"I am too disgusted to be that," she replied, and her mouth quivered. She did not glance at him, but stood gazing out on to the compound, where the cocks and hens ran at will.

"I am sorry," he said weakly, still sucking the lemon.

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There was silence for a few moments; then she turned round as if she had suddenly made up her mind.

"Moung," she exclaimed, "I want you to give up these people. What use, what charm, have they? They are vulgar and illiterate. One derives nothing but annoyances and offence from their society."

"They are kind, and we don't know any one else intimately," he said, sitting up and wiping his bare chest where the juice had run down it.

"Better to know no one, if one can't know the right people."

"You can get on without human companionship; I can't," he announced, and he looked sulky.

"Even so; but why let that companionship influence you for evil?"

He was silent.

"In any case," she pursued, "associating with the Rooneys at all is, as you well know, very *infra dig.* from a Rangoon or, indeed, any other point of view."

"Rangoon is always unkind," he protested, shaking his bare feet to and fro.

"Possibly; but if I am to judge by last night, I fancy that Rangoon is right in this instance." She looked at him. He had not been shaved, and was all green round the chin.

"I have no time to listen to your homilies," he declared, hastily pushing the wooden slides of the chair apart. "I must go to the office"; saying which, he

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shouted for the boy, and some minutes later she heard him splashing in his bath.

She sat where she was, thinking gravely on things. She felt greatly and profoundly, and though she desired passionately one thing, she yet doubted her ability to attain to it. He must be led, and led invisibly—and yet how? Those who stooped to flattery would always do what they willed with him; while she, unhappily, was too straightforward, and too great a believer in his intelligence, to pay it so poor a compliment. Obstinacy and weakness were unquestionably the dominant notes of his character—even more pronounced now than at the time of their marriage. What two qualities are more difficult to combat? The issues of each, or both, are many and manifold; and how can one tell which will come uppermost at any time or under any circumstance? She was puzzled and pained and depressed. The task that she had set her hand to gained in magnitude and difficulty.

At breakfast he was moody and silent. He complained of feeling ill, and asked for brandy.

"There is none in the house," she replied.

"Then don't order it," he said; "I don't want to take to it again. I shall be late," he added, as he lit a cigar and took his topee from the boy.

Then he left her, and she went with slow step and perturbed mind about her household and other duties. She spent a long day and a sad one: it rained heavily, too, and the atmosphere was gloomy and overcast. A

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drive was impossible; so she changed, and sat awaiting his coming with a book in the drawing-room.

At seven o'clock he returned; but his state was such that he went straight to bed, and she ate her dinner by herself, and tried to think that his present condition was only the melancholy result of the previous evening.

She sat late in the big bare room upstairs, his stertorous breathing rising above the hum of the insects that buzzed round the lamp, and above the noise of the durwan patrolling the bungalow below. At about two o'clock she went to bed, and shortly afterwards she heard Moung Gyaw get up and go into the outer room, followed by the sound of the opening of a soda-water bottle. Presently he came to her.

"Are you awake?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered wearily. "What is it you want?"

"I am looking for the brandy," he replied. "I am thirsty."

"I did not order any," she exclaimed.

"D——n it all! why didn't you?" he grumbled, and then he left her.

Awhile later he was once more fast asleep.

She felt as if she should never sleep again. From that time onward the battle really began. All his good resolutions seemed to have suddenly melted away like a mirage. All her entreaties, all her protests, spoke to him in vain.

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It would be idle, even were it possible, to follow the current of her life in its every detail through the weeks that followed immediately on that night. Nor would it be possible to set down in words the disappointed hopes, the bitterness of spirit, the fatigue of heart and mind, that were hers, in all their several variety.

It is a task for Hercules to win a person away from drink, even when that person is ready to a certain extent to come; but when not——! It is true that when she talked to him, painting the price that the future would exact from him, he would listen; he would even make her solemn promises—promises broken almost as soon as made. His pet sin held him fast. She hardly knew how even to begin to cope with it; at best her weapons would of necessity be very feeble. She began by keeping the house with short supplies. That, however, only made him angry, and he would send a messenger to the town or to the gymkhana for what he wanted, reproaching her bitterly the while. Then she descended to taking the khansamah into her confidence, and ordering him to mix master's drinks weaker. That also was a failure. Then she cast round in her mind for some one who would have sufficient weight with him to speak to him with more effect than anything she said seemed likely to have; but she could think of no one. And with the passing of the days he seemed only to give himself up more completely to its spell. Rapidly it was nothing uncommon for him to have to

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be supported into the gharri of a morning to go to his office.

She marvelled inwardly at the clients being willing still to entrust their cases to him. And those hours, those weeks, how grievous and painful they were to her—he going faster with the tide, she unable to stay his progress! Gladly he gave himself up to those eddying waters of vanity and folly, while the sense of her helplessness and want of influence fretted her almost beyond endurance. Neither love nor respect were hers to command, but what she could compel herself to render to him, that she did with all her heart and soul. Consideration, attention, solicitude, companionship—those she lavished on him with the utmost liberality.

Of the Rooneys she saw nothing. Mrs Rooney had called, but she had been "dawaza bund"; and though Jack dropped in once or twice in the early morning, it was to see Moung Gyaw. She had every reason to believe that Moung Gyaw constantly went to see them, as he frequently returned very late from office, and occasionally said that he had called at Rooney's on his way back. Indeed, as often as not, there were other evidences of those visits.

She took her evening drives nearly always alone, varied by an occasional pause at the bungalow of some Scotch friends lately married, who led an ideal life, and whose unspoken gladness in one another it both pleased and pained her to contemplate.

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Perhaps it would have been possible, if fate had been otherwise, that she might have been like that; but now it was too late. Too late! Those two words are among the saddest ever written or spoken. For her there was no place among the love and laughter of the world. That reflection added but one more drop of sadness to the cup which she had of her own action filled for herself, and was now forced by destiny to drink to the very dregs.

Just before Christmas her brother-in law came down from Akyab on a short visit. She hailed his coming with pleasure. It was so welcome, the thought of some one to talk to, especially some one who was young, and with whom she had mutual and pleasant memories. But Moung Gyaw was not pleased.

"You can entertain him," he said; "I shall take my meals apart."

Shway Tha arrived on Saturday, and she went to meet the boat.

"Where is Boss?" he asked that evening, when they returned from a long drive round the Lakes.

"Oh, he will be in soon," she answered, reddening slightly. The ayah had sent her word that master had returned from office two hours before, and was in bed.

"I don't *hear* very good accounts of him. Is it true what they say?" he asked after a while, regarding her narrowly.

"That he takes too much stimulant?" she answered slowly.

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He nodded his head.

"Yes," he said, "and the old man is fearfully cut up about it. Unfortunately, he blames you. He has some absurd notion that all white people drink. He has a great horror of Christianity on that account."

"I don't wonder," she observed, "when one looks at the missionaries and the harm they do."

"There is no excuse for Boss ever taking any spirits, least of all too much. I suppose he very seldom does that?" he added anxiously.

"Oh, please don't let's talk of it; I'd much rather not," she answered abruptly. The notion that his father in any way blamed her struck hard at the hidden sorrow within her. She felt that she had failed from their point of view, no less than from her own. Such a reflection was truly a barbed arrow.

"I wonder," her brother-in-law said, changing the subject, "if Boss could make it convenient to pay me a small share of my money on the mortgage of the house?"

"What do you mean?" she asked him in surprise; "did you not have it all at the time?"

"No," he said, "none of it. Moung Gyaw said you wanted it, and so I let it go."

"I!" Her eyes opened wide.

"Yes, you, dear—and as it was for your sake, I did not mind in the least."

"But I never had any of it," she declared.

"Then Boss told me an untruth!"

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"We were very badly off in England," she pursued. "I was wretched most of the time, and he was always complaining of lack of money."

"He ought not to have," he replied; "he took very nearly a thousand pounds over with him."

She was silent; she felt that there was nothing to be said.

At that moment they heard a heavy step overhead, followed by the flip-flop of a loose wooden slipper on the bare stairway.

"There he is," she said, and almost simultaneously Moung Gyaw appeared. He wore a loonygee and silk jacket, and he nodded moodily at his brother, as if they had parted only that morning. His displeasure at Shway Tha's appearance was more intelligible to her now. Moung Gyaw called the boy to bring his long chair, and got into it. Lately he had taken entirely to a recumbent position.

"How are the home people?" he asked Shway Tha. His tone was one of indifference.

"All well," was the laconic reply.

Then there ensued a pause.

"Has the evening paper come?" Moung Gyaw enquired, looking towards his wife.

"No, not yet," she answered.

He yawned. "Let us have some champagne," he said, shaking his feet to and fro.

"Would you like it?" she asked, turning towards her brother-in-law.

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"Yes, I think I would!" he admitted. He thought it might consolidate things. In response to the order, the khansamah brought two big bottles, of which Moung Gyaw drank one. Soon after he called for a cocktail.

"I wouldn't have it if I were you," Mrs Moung Gyaw interposed gently. "Wait until dinner, and then have some claret instead." She glanced at him entreatingly. He took no notice whatever, except to repeat the order to the dressing-boy, whose pleasant duty it was to remain within easy call, and to very often suggest or invent new mixtures for the sahib.

"I will have another," Moung Gyaw exclaimed, now handing back the empty glass.

"It is very bad for you," Shway Tha plucked up sufficient courage to say, breaking the somewhat embarrassing silence.

"D——n you! leave me alone," was the gracious reply, which effectually checked conversation, with the result that Shway Tha shortly afterwards rose and went to dress.

Mrs Moung Gyaw paused by her husband's side; she looked down at him sorrowfully.

"Go away," he said, "and leave me alone." Then he shouted once more for his trembling attendant, and commanded him to massage his thighs. The boy obediently set to to knead his master's bare legs with the palms and knuckles of his hands, whilst his master

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drank slowly, in lazy, smiling beatitude, now and then dropping into a little doze. But woe betide the boy, if, deceived by this apparent slumber, he relaxed his labours; a smart kick in the region of the stomach very soon recalled him to his task.

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CHAPTER XXI

An hour later, when dinner was announced, Moung Gyaw was still lying in his chair, and deep in the evening paper.

"Go in without me, I shall dine later," he said in reply to his wife's invitation.

It was a somewhat gloomy meal, for neither Shway Tha nor his sister-in-law spoke of the subject nearest their thoughts, albeit they saw a stiff brandy-and-soda being carried out to the master. When they joined him in the drawing-room, he said he would have his dinner brought to him there. Shway Tha and Mrs Moung Gyaw sat under the punkah and carried on a desultory converse, while the boy laid a small table; but when the soup was brought, the master rejected it with a wave of his hand.

"Curry," he muttered thickly, with a hiccough. When the curry made its appearance he was too far gone to help himself, so the boy fed him with a spoon as if he were a baby, his tipsy eyes rolling round the while in a dull and senseless stare. Then the servant

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wiped his mouth and cleared the dishes away, and the two spectators heaved a sigh of relief. Mrs Moung Gyaw presently went with Shway Tha out into the compound.

"Is this your life, you poor thing?" he asked with emotion.

"This is my life," she answered briefly; and somehow the listener guessed how much lay beneath that brevity.

No more was said then. They continued to walk to and fro for fully half an hour, and when at last they went within, the lights were lowered and Moung Gyaw had disappeared.

The following morning, Sunday, Moung Gyaw was up and about by seven, in high spirits, with no sign of the night before on him. He asked them to go driving with him; but Mrs Moung Gyaw said that she was going to Mass, and that Shway Tha would accompany her. So Moung Gyaw went off in his tum-tum alone.

As Mrs Moung Gyaw and her brother-in-law lingered together over a late breakfast, Moung Gyaw returned. He was covered with mud, and his topee was smashed; he had had a spill in a ditch in the York Road. The pony took fright, he said — the syce's account was different, and he was very irate about it. When he had changed, and swallowed some raw eggs and sherry, he retired to bed and slept till close on half-past five o'clock. He had done that for the last three Sundays,

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so his wife expressed no surprise. Not so Shway Tha, who observed involuntarily:

"How changed he is! Do you remember how alert he used to be? Now he is more like Rip van Winkle than anything else."

"Yes," she replied sorrowfully; "and yet what is one to do to alter it?"

"What indeed?" he repeated; "he will have his own way in everything."

At four o'clock, as there happened to be little or no sun, Mrs Moung Gyaw proposed a drive out to the Victoria Lake. When they came back two hours later, she was surprised to see Mrs Rooney's barouche waiting inside the gate, and heard with displeasure that the memsahib was above, having called to enquire after the sahib.

"Mrs Rooney is here," she said, turning to her brother-in-law.

"I don't want to meet her," he exclaimed. "I only once saw her; it was in the bar at Sarkie's Hotel," he continued, as they started to walk slowly up the drive, "and her language—well——" He paused; and the pause was more eloquent than speech.

"I shall go in the back way and join you when she has gone," he said, as a bend in the road brought the house in sight.

Mrs Rooney and Moung Gyaw were sitting together —or, to be more correct, the latter was lying down— on the gravelled plateau before the front door. Mrs

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Rooney, who was very subdued and quite sober, seemed honestly glad at Mrs Moung Gyaw's advent, and genuinely upset about the accident, which she had witnessed. She appeared relieved to find that there were no serious consequences, and sat on chatting about various things for some little time, till her hostess almost forgot and forgave the incident of a few weeks ago, and with the mistaken kindness of a nature that, with all its faults, was at least not ungenerous, even found herself eventually making excuses for the offender.

It is true that when Mrs Rooney was sober, there was that air of hearty, unaffected good-nature about her that won others round against their better judgment to withhold blame and let pity take its place. On this occasion her conduct was in every way most decorous, and when she rose to go she very wisely declined Moung Gyaw's invitation to stay on for dinner.

"I will walk down to the gate with you," Mrs Moung Gyaw said civilly. Moung Gyaw retained his recumbent position.

"Do you mind if I lean on you?" Mrs Rooney asked. "The ground is so rough and my heels are very high. That's better," she added, as Mrs Moung Gyaw gave her her arm, and the little woman glanced up at the tall figure beside her.

"Mrs Moung Gyaw," she said abruptly, "would you be very offended if I said something to you?"

"I don't easily take offence," was the quick answer.

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"Well, do you know," Mrs Rooney commenced seriously, "that if Moung Gyaw goes on as he is going, nothing can save him from D.T.'s?"

Mrs Moung Gyaw started.

"Oh no," she cried in alarm, "surely not anything like that?"

"Yes," Mrs Rooney reiterated; "because he has been at it for so many months now. I spoke to him over and over again, so did Jack, because you must know that, although I drink myself, no one deplores it in others more than I."

She paused, and her listener's heart warmed to her for her honesty.

"He told us," she pursued, "that he was so lonely without you that he drank to console himself; but now you have come, and he is at it harder than ever."

"It was a poor excuse," Mrs Moung Gyaw commented. "Fancy if all the lonely men in Burmah flew to the brandy bottle!" Her lip curled.

"Ah! but he is so weak," Mrs Rooney exclaimed. They had stopped in their walk and were leaning against the white palings enclosing a vegetable patch. "And weakness is, I always think, criminal in a man."

"It is indeed," agreed Mrs Moung Gyaw with a sigh. "I have seen so much evil come of it," she added gravely.

Then Mrs Rooney turned to her.

"My dear," she exclaimed, "*can't* you keep the drink from him?"

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"I do my best," was the passionate reply, while the hot tears sprang to her eyes.

"You must do better," and Mrs Rooney patted her arm affectionately. "It will not be easy either—that I clearly see."

"Mrs Rooney," her hostess remarked, "I once heard an Englishman, who had had long experience of the East, say that once a native took a downward path he never trod any other. Is there any truth in that, do you think?"

"We will hope not," the other made answer thoughtfully, and then they resumed their slow walk. "To a certain extent," Mrs Rooney pursued, "I sympathised with him when he said he was lonely: it was loneliness that first made me like brandy."

Mrs Moung Gyaw listened in silence. Perhaps, and with some reason, she had but little feeling for those who sought and found comfort in such a resource. Had she not been lonely also? Was she not, indeed, always so? The desolation of her heart, the bitterness of her reflections—would any one ever measure all that?

"Loneliness is very hard to bear when one is young," Mrs Rooney said at last, as she helped herself into her waiting carriage. "May Daisy come and see you one day?" she asked, holding out her hand. "She would like to so much."

"Yes, if she wishes," Mrs Moung Gyaw replied somewhat absently.

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Mrs Rooney smiled her thanks and drove off, while Mrs Moung Gyaw went back up the drive deep in unquiet thought. It was a brilliant night; the earth throbbing in the moonlight seemed at its loveliest; but she had no eye for its beauty, she was devoured by her despair.

"Will you bring up the subject of the money to him when you have an opportunity?" Shway Tha said to her the following day. "The fact is," he added, "I owe a chetty three thousand rupees and I daren't tell the father."

"I will," she answered him; "but I fear that I shall have very little success. Personally, I know nothing definite, but I am afraid his affairs are in a hopeless muddle, and he always gets angry if one asks him questions."

When Moung Gyaw was dressing that morning, she went to his room, and after a few preliminary remarks, asked him outright for a few thousand rupees for Shway Tha. The effect was electrical.

"What the devil does he come begging here for?" he enquired angrily, pausing in the act of tying his tie.

"One can hardly call it begging to ask for one's own," she remarked quietly, looking him full in the eye.

"Yes, it is begging," he retorted fiercely; "I deny all responsibility in the matter. It was through you that his name was included in the purchase at all." His tone was distinctly resentful.

"I know that," she said; "but, as it *was* included,

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he is clearly entitled to his share. After all, he has waited two years, and even now he does not ask for all."

"All, indeed!" he cried contemptuously. "He can ask for what he d——d well pleases, he'll never get a single rupee of it. I couldn't afford to pay anything even if I were willing." And having tied his tie to his own satisfaction, he became deep in the momentous choice of a waistcoat.

"But——" she persisted.

"I'll not hear another word on the subject. A nice coward he is, coming complaining to you!" Moung Gyaw said haughtily.

"He did not complain to me," she rejoined.

"Well, mentioning it at all—that's what I mean; he had no right to." He was turning to the right and left before the cheval glass as he said this.

"He had every right to, and you are behaving most dishonourably," she answered him with unpleasant emphasis.

"How dare you suggest that I ever could do anything dishonourable?" he demanded, with a fine show of outraged pride.

"I don't suggest, I assert it," she retorted without flinching.

"I am the guardian of my own honour," he announced majestically, arranging a silk handkerchief in his coat pocket.

"I am sorry it is in such poor keeping," she said

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contemptuously; and then, without further words, quitted the room, and went to her own and closed the door.

"How impossible he always was over money!" she thought, while her lips were pale with the force of her displeasure.

Presently she heard him call for his dressing-boy, with whom he had a heated altercation, in which "you d——d sua" occurred very often, followed by blows. Then the boy rushed down the stairs three steps at a time, and flew across the compound towards the cook-house, his turban all disarranged. She watched him go. Of course he would not come back, and would make the fifth of his personal servants who had run away in three weeks. His temper was so uncertain and so violent of late, and nearly always about some unconsidered trifle, that the household was terrified of him, and her nerves often felt like a sharp steel knife.

"Master will want a dressing-boy," she said to the khansamah later in the day.

He shook his head; then he made answer that he himself had better see to master's clothes, as all the boys were afraid to take service with him, he had such a name in the bazaar for beating.

"I will have Ginger back," Moung Gyaw announced when this was repeated to him.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"I don't expect the khansamah will work with him," his wife remarked.

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"Then the khansamah can d——d well go; Ginger suits me."

As a matter of fact, the khansamah was far too high-class a servant for his taste.

Shway Tha accepted the answer about the money with an excellent grace. It is true that he only heard a very modified account of the interview, and the refusal was considerably tempered, though Mrs Moung Gyaw did not scruple to express strongly her disapproval and her intense indignation at the way he had been treated.

Shway Tha went back to Akyab by the Wednesday morning boat.

"I'm glad he's gone," Moung Gyaw declared; "it makes a great difference in expenses, having a visitor."

"Surely he did not cost very much?"

"Oh, I don't know. There were seven rupees extra bazaar money."

"Not very ruinous outlay, certainly," she commented. His meanness was sometimes quite comical.

On the evening of that day he announced quite suddenly, *a propos* of nothing, that he had become a Freemason.

"What on earth induced you to become a Freemason?" she asked in astonishment. The action was not at all pleasing to her.

"Oh, I don't know," he said, shaking his bare feet to and fro, and gathering the long black hair on his chest between his thumb and his first finger, twirling it round and then letting it go.

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"How much did it cost you?"

"Only a hundred and fifty rupees," he answered her airily.

"Only a hundred and fifty rupees!" and she had been asking him for fifty rupees for over a month to pay a small bill. How like him it was! How like! She glanced at him. He looked unaccountably pleased with himself.

"Shall we have an egg curry for dinner?" he asked presently, as the result of his meditations.

"Are you going to dine with me?"

"Yes, I think so. I am feeling rather cheerful to-day. I got a case to go to Mandalay next month." His feet went to and fro more violently than ever.

"I am very glad. I wish all your cases made you inclined to dine with me; I find it so desolate always sitting down alone," she said.

"I must try to alter my habits," he rejoined, looking across at her.

"Will you come for a drive to the town?" he suggested a little later.

"Yes," she agreed, "certainly."

They drove to China Street and bought some fruit and other things. He purchased several queer-looking eatables from Mahommedan and other stalls, which were neatly wrapped up in plantain leaves fastened with small sticks, making quite fascinating little parcels. These he gave to the syce to put in the carriage.

Moung Gyaw talked a great deal, and was, indeed,

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unusually affable. It was most surprising, for, as a rule, on the rare occasions when he did drive with her, he generally fell fast asleep. To-day he was more like his old self than he had been for months. Her doubts and troubles began to melt to a certain degree away. In the regime of starvation on which she was usually kept, the smallest crumbs of condescension were welcome. In any case, she had the true Celtic temperament, which is easily elated—that nature which Charles Lever described right well when he said: "A reprieve is as good as a pardon to an Irishman."

When they reached home he gave the things they had brought to the boy, and told him to bring them on to the verandah, as he would eat them at once. Then he went and changed into his inevitable loonygee, and came, with his feet bare, and sat with her, still in a most excellent humour.

"Do you really like being without shoes and stockings?" she asked him out of idle curiosity, watching him pass one naked foot over the other caressingly.

"Oh yes," he answered; "it is such a relief."

"You never used to think so—that is, when you were in England," she remarked.

"Oh, that was quite different," he rejoined. "I really think, after all, I prefer Burmah. There is more freedom and less stiffness," and he scratched himself vigorously.

"And when you come in for your money, will you still live here — or will you go back, as you once

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used to say, and try for Parliament?" she said curiously.

He shook his head and twirled his toes.

"No," he answered. "The money, when the debts are paid, wouldn't admit of one's doing things well enough over there; one is really better off here—and with the child coming."

This was the first time he had alluded to an event that she had been endeavouring unsuccessfully for some time past to put away out of her thoughts. She started now at his abrupt reminder. She gave a little irrepressible shudder. To her the idea was hateful—hateful—for many complicated reasons. Firstly, she disliked children; and secondly, although she hardly admitted it to herself, she disliked her husband with force and conviction.

In novels usually, and in plays invariably, the crucial test of maternity never fails; but in real life, and especially in the life of which I write, it is better to let the question, fraught as it was with so much pain, pass by.

"We will not talk of it," she said at last; adding, with a sudden outburst of passion: "I loathe the thought."

"You are not flattering to me," he remarked with a certain asperity.

"No," she agreed, "I am not; but it's how I shall always feel."

He did not answer, while the boy, who had just entered

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with a tray, proceeded to arrange many little dishes containing weird-looking compounds in a semicircle round his master, who, sitting up, with a napkin tied under his chin, began to help himself rapidly to one after another. She watched him. He was so obviously and so gleefully greedy, that, though he would never have acknowledged it, he clearly much preferred that sort of meal to an English dinner. He proceeded to pile up mounds of sodden-looking cold rice and dried fish, all of which he mixed very carefully and deliberately, shaking his legs rapidly to and fro as he did so. How horrid it was to watch him feed! There was a pause while he crunched the chicken bones between his teeth like a hungry dog. Then he spat out the remains on to the plate, rinsed and wiped his mouth, and pushed the tray aside.

"What if I told you something?" he remarked abruptly, helping himself to a cigar from a box at his elbow.

"Yes," she replied, "no doubt I shall be interested. Occasionally you are instructive; once or twice you have been known to be amusing."

"Well," he continued, ignoring her remark, "I have had it for a long time." He paused to strike a match.

"Yes?" she observed interrogatively.

He threw the match away and leant back in his chair.

"It is," he said, "that I feel that I should like to have a son by a Burmese woman. She would have to

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be good-looking and perfectly healthy, and I thought that you might choose her." He removed his cigar from his mouth and looked towards her.

"Really, it is, as you say, a queer idea, I fear; you pay me too great a compliment in asking my assistance." Her expression was quite immutable.

"You quite understand that I should have no feeling in the matter," he assured her: "I simply want a child of my own race."

"Napoleon's desire for a son made him brutal: yours makes you, though you may not realise it, distinctly insulting." She gazed across with her bright, indolent eyes, that occasionally saw so accurately and so far, and that now never wavered in their rejection of him.

"It is a perfectly natural wish on the part of a man," he said, "especially a man who is going to be as great as I am. He owes it to posterity."

"Possibly," she answered curtly. After all, it was absurd for her to feel any offence against him. Women were only *la femelle de l'homme* to him, and no more. If only she had awoken to that fact long ago!

"It could be quite easy to manage," he pursued, deceived completely by her silence. "You could have a nice young Burmese ayah instead of a native of India."

For a moment an unutterable indignation vibrated through her, eclipsing all other feeling. It passed quickly, and then she said quite gravely and calmly:

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"What, if I told you that I have given some thought to this very subject, and that I feel that I would like to have a son by a man of my own colour?"

"What!" he cried, staring at her as if he thought she had suddenly taken leave of her senses. "What do you mean?"

"Just what I have said." She nodded her head. "What have you to say?"

"Say!" he repeated. His voice seemed strangled in his throat. "Why, I think it's quite the coarsest and most disgusting idea I have ever heard of."

She laughed a little to herself. How amusing these people with no sense of humour always were! But his annoyance and surprise found outlet in a fit of loud and unrestrained sneezing.

"I wonder what your mother would say if she heard this?" he exclaimed, when he had sufficiently recovered to be able to speak.

He was fond of parading his mother-in-law on occasion —at one time he had done it with some effect.

"Better not to wonder — it is so fatiguing," his wife rejoined airily, and she took up a book of poems that lay near and was soon immersed in them.

He maintained a long silence; he was feeling very vexed. In a vague way he thought that she had had the best of the discussion: and that was an idea not to be tolerated.

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CHAPTER XXII

THE following week he went out to the district on a case, and she, mindful of her promise, invited Daisy Rooney to dine with her. The girl, who was delighted, arrived early.

"*I* will send you home," Mrs Moung Gyaw said, in reply to her enquiry as to when she should order the carriage to return.

The evening, at least from the guest's point of view, was a delightful one. Mrs Moung Gyaw told her of London and of Ireland, of life as it was understood and lived in Europe, of books and theatres and picture galleries. Nevertheless, it was uphill work to entertain Daisy; she lacked animation, and she lacked interest. Her intelligence, such as it was, was far from cultured. The vast beautiful Universe held for her nothing wider or more soul-reaching than Rangoon—unless it was, perhaps, a certain shyly-expressed interest in her absent host. Anything concerning him—his boyhood in England, his successes at the Temple, or his present —called forth a degree of eagerness and interrogation

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greatly surprising to her hostess, being so much in contrast to her apathy otherwise. Mrs Moung Gyaw noted it with an indulgent smile, of which the compassion and the disdain alike escaped her guest.

It was ten o'clock when, having given the order for the gharri, Mrs Moung Gyaw sat with Daisy awaiting it in the drawing-room. The durwan suddenly made his appearance in the doorway, and said, with a profound salaam, in Hindustani: "Rooney memsahib is coming up"; in confirmation of which news, they heard the sound of wheels advancing nearer.

"Mother has come for me," Daisy cried, and her cheek blanched.

A second later, and a voice sang out: "Here I am; come and fetch me," while through the open woodwork of the house the carriage and its lamps became visible.

Mrs Moung Gyaw rose, and, followed by Daisy, went to the entrance, and beheld Mrs Rooney preparing to descend, assisted by the syce.

"I've come to fetch Daisy," she announced, walking unsteadily towards them, "and I want a drink."

Mrs Moung Gyaw sighed inwardly; she wondered if there had ever been any period, howsoever brief, of the speaker's life when she had not wanted a drink.

"How are you, dear?" exclaimed Mrs Rooney, entering. "I am so excited and upset at the Princess of Wales having a son."

Mrs Moung Gyaw felt inclined to laugh, the idea

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was so grotesquely absurd. Mrs Rooney, declining an invitation to go into the drawing-room, sat down at the dinner-table, which was still covered with a white cloth.

"I'll have a brandy," she announced, letting her eyes travel slowly round.

Daisy looked miserably apprehensive, but Mrs Moung Gyaw, who grasped the situation, said there was no brandy in the house.

"Nonsense!" was the sharp rejoinder; "Moung Gyaw always has it, and I am going to have some. It seems to me that there is a conspiracy against my having anything to drink to-night. Why, even Jack—but oh! d——n Jack!——" She broke off suddenly, and stared in tipsy defiance at Daisy and her hostess.

The servant, a silent witness of the foregoing, brought and mixed a brandy-and-soda for her with a trembling hand. Every one in the bazaar knew how violent Rooney memsahib could be on occasion. Without a word she gulped it down, her eyes taking in the expression of each of her auditors as she did so.

Mrs Moung Gyaw rose to her feet, Daisy sat motionless; but their hostess without a word left them, and leaving word to the boy to attend on the visitors till their departure, went upstairs, carefully closing the wooden door after her. Mrs Rooney staggered to her feet and made as if to follow, but fell forward on her face and hands, thus bringing her visit to a speedy conclusion. In that condition she was raised and carried by the boy, the syce, and the durwan to her conveyance,

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and, accompanied by Daisy, drove home, jerking out confused apologies, punctuated by hiccoughs, all the way.

Moung Gyaw returned the next day from Mandalay, and on the following, left for Pegu to conduct a murder trial; but his wife was not alone, as a brother-in-law in the Government service came to Rangoon from Bassein on a few days' privilege leave. Moung Gyaw, who had expected to have been detained at least ten days, returned suddenly without notice. He was in wild spirits—in fact, so much so, that he condescended to be unusually civil in his greeting of his young brother, whom he usually hardly ever addressed, being always so fearful that they might grow to regard him with anything but the most exaggerated form of respect.

"What brings you back so soon?" his wife asked in some surprise. "Is the case finished?"

"Yes," he said.

"It was surprisingly quick work, wasn't it?"

"Yes," he repeated, adding: "And the reason is amusing. Old Stick-in-the-mud, the magistrate, wants to go to the Dak bungalow to-night; and when he heard I would have to sleep there, he rushed the case through. There were twenty-three witnesses on the other side prepared to swear to seeing my man commit the murder, and Bourke would not hear any of them,—said there was no evidence, and acquitted the accused in ample time for me to catch the down train."

"What a fine thing justice is in this country!" Mrs Moung Gyaw remarked drily.

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"I got a wire from Akyab at the office just now," Moung Gyaw continued, addressing his brother. "The father is coming down very soon. I shall try and get some money out of him this time."

"So shall I," his brother echoed, looking up from trying to make a damp Burmah cheroot take light.

Moung Gyaw frowned; he was not pleased.

"Oh, you can't ask," he declared imperiously, "because then he won't give me anything."

His wife laughed; his selfishness was invariably superb.

"You are far better off than I am," Shwè Ban said; "besides, he has given you so much from time to time."

"How do you know that?" Moung Gyaw demanded, glancing suspiciously at the speaker.

Shwè Ban shrugged his thin shoulders slightly.

"Oh, it's bazaar talk," he replied.

"It is not true," said Moung Gyaw; "but, bazaar talk or not, he will have to open up this time. Chundera is clamouring for three thousand rupees' interest on the mortgage, and the old man will have to pay it."

Shwè Ban gave a long low whistle, and his wife's eyes opened wide with surprise.

"That Bengali baboo is nothing but a highwayman," Shwè Ban observed at last.

Moung Gyaw smiled. He had imbibed a very large quantity of bad champagne on the way from Pegu, and it had filled him for the time being with courage sufficient

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to be delightfully indifferent to earthly affairs, and even to Chundera.

"The father will pay, because I can't," he reiterated, still smiling.

"You had better insure your life before you ask him!" his brother said grimly.

"I am not afraid of the father," Moung Gyaw answered, throwing his head back; "I am not afraid of any one!"

This was certainly quite a new phase, and both his listeners looked at him interrogatively. In proof of what he had said, he pushed back the sleeve of his coat, and displayed a long, much-tattooed arm completely devoid of muscle. His wife smiled involuntarily. He looked almost grotesque as he stood there.

"Is that the strong arm of the law?" she asked.

He turned his sleeve down again; his smile vanished.

"You are rude, as usual," he said; then he left them both, in offence.

"What a fool he was to have ever mortgaged the house!" she said, with a retrospective sigh.

"He did it for you, so it was always said," Shwè Ban rejoined.

"That is utterly untrue. As a matter of fact, I never knew anything about it until he came to London. Had I been consulted, I would never have agreed."

"That's what I thought; you are, at least, always sensible about money, while he——" He spread out his hands and lifted his brows eloquently.

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"What he does with his money I can never make out," she pursued speculatively.

"Nor can any one else. I fully believe that he never makes anything like the fees that he says."

"Possibly!"

"Then that clerk of his, I don't trust him. He was turned out of the Bombay Burmah for taking bribes and embezzling," he told her, as he puffed at his cheroot.

"Was he? I never knew that," Mrs Moung Gyaw ejaculated in much surprise.

"Oh yes," Shwè Ban continued; "and then you know he is an awful gambler. But he is a good clerk, and he brings cases: one must admit that."

"Do you mean that he is a tout?" she asked.

"Oh, Lord, no!" he interposed quickly; "I only meant that he understood his work."

"Still, all that does not by any means explain where the money goes," she remarked.

"I was coming to that. My theory is this: when Moung Gyaw wants money, Kywin Thwe goes round and gets it somehow or other, and Boss signs whatever papers are brought to him without examining them, grabs the sum, and doesn't realise how much the clerk pockets beforehand—or how everybody is doing him."

"No doubt you are right," she responded thoughtfully; "but it is not a very pleasant reflection for me, for instance."

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"I should think not," Shwè Ban exclaimed promptly; "besides, it's perfect madness on the master's part. What with that Bengali sua on one side, and his Burman servant on the other, he is in a tight place."

He took a sip from a glass of iced water as he spoke, and looked at her.

"He ought to be extricated before it's too late," she said.

Shwè Ban shook his head doubtfully.

"Who is to do it? Who can possibly influence a man of thirty-six who is determined to go his own way, though that way spells ruin?"

"Of course it's useless for you or me to try," she agreed sadly.

"Quite," he answered decisively; "because, if he followed your or my advice, he would have to stop short, change his clerk, shake off that Bengali octopus, and face his debts and his creditors one by one—and that he will never do." He paused and lit another cheroot. She was silent.

"Boss's nature," he continued, "is one of sensuous ease; he will always float with the tide, and he will never take an oar himself. Where he walks will be in the wake of those who kick away the stones from his path. The person who is content to be so led was not born to lead."

"I wish one could make him realise it all before it's too late," she said earnestly.

"Time may—but it is doubtful—open his eyes to a

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good many ungracious truths, but it is entirely certain that you and I never could."

She sighed. He spoke the truth, and in so speaking he displayed a far greater degree of penetration that she would have looked for.

"You have observed him closely," she remarked.

"Yes," he replied, "I have; and much that I have observed has pained me greatly and filled me with doubt."

"But it seemed so impossible," she pursued, "that any one who promised so brilliantly, should, of his own free-will, make such havoc of things. Where has his cleverness disappeared to?"

"Being rapidly stifled under the fumes of selfishness, if you ask me," the other rejoined.

"But to think of the brilliant promise of his student days!" she reiterated. "Don't you remember what every one predicted in London?"

"The worst possible guarantee for success in after-years. It's a widely different order of intelligence that wins scholarships from that which surmounts successfully the trials and losses of everyday life. Moung Gyaw is a very glaring example of the fallacy of that theory, you will admit."

He rose from his chair.

She did not answer him. Mentally she admitted the correctness of what he said; certainly no one made a greater mess of ordinary affairs than Moung Gyaw.

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"I think I'll go down to the town for an hour, but I shall be back in time for dinner," Shwè Ban declared.

"Don't be late," she said as he went.

She sat alone thinking for a little while. After all, she thought, it was not, as she had once heard some one say, for people of meteoric brilliance that the world's prizes were reserved. They might dazzle for awhile; but they died out. A fustian order of mind was, perchance, Fate's kindest gift. At one time she would have scouted such an idea, but she was learning hourly, and with the learning came the realisation that there were far more philtres on earth than ever she had dreamed of in her philosophy. She remembered Moung Gyaw when he had been in England as a student. How eager he had been! how fond of books! how ambitious of a public life! And now — now he was content to pawn his intelligence, his present, and his future, for drink!

She sighed heavily. She wished—oh, how she wished! —for so many things, none of which ever seemed likely to be granted.

She rose and leant over the verandah. Moung Gyaw in his loonygee was walking in the compound; the boy was holding an umbrella over his head, the khansamah bore a tray with a whisky-and-soda, while the matey carried the fowls' food in a bag, from which every now and then, at the bidding of the sahib, he distributed a few handfuls on the ground. Moung Gyaw was talking loudly, and giving any amount of contradictory orders,

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at which the servants grinned amongst themselves, and exchanged significant glances behind his back, of which his wife was the unseen spectator.

Presently Kywin Thwe, the Burman clerk, arrived with some papers. He joined the slowly circulating group, and was immediately taken into his master's confidence on all and sundry matters, from the growing of rose-trees to the laying of eggs. It was a great habit of Moung Gyaw to ask every one's advice about everything; sometimes, indeed, putting people to serious trouble, and invariably in the end taking the worst course possible by following his own.

The clerk listened respectfully, but when his master paused to swallow his fourth whisky-and-soda, he ventured to say that he had brought some clients who wanted to engage him on a case.

"How much will they pay?" Moung Gyaw asked, his attention instantly arrested.

"I don't know," the clerk replied; "they are Jungle people; I do not think they have much money."

"*I* will see them," he exclaimed majestically, and directed a long chair to be brought out for him to lie upon. The clerk disappeared, returning in about ten minutes followed by an old woman and a boy, who both glanced fearfully round as they shuffled along. The woman was very old, very, very shrunken, and had somewhat the appearance of an elderly monkey; the boy was big and awkward, with long matted hair and a shy, fleeting expression. Both were miserably dressed.

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Mrs Moung Gyaw watched them with interest. As they drew nearer, they advanced with a crouching apologetic air, and then, on observing Moung Gyaw, they both fell on their knees. The old woman, stretching forth her wrinkled bony hands in supplication, commenced her tale in a broken and rapid fashion. Once or twice Moung Gyaw interrupted her to ask a question, when the clerk would come to the rescue; otherwise she alone spoke.

As she proceeded, great tears fell slowly down her cheeks, her voice shook with emotion; then she stopped and bowed in the dust of the gravel, a poor pathetic figure, her frail form shaken by sobs.

"What is it she wishes?" Mrs Moung Gyaw asked, having come down from upstairs.

"Oh, she wants me to defend her grandson," Moung Gyaw answered, "who in a fit of passion killed his sweetheart with a dah, and is now in gaol. The old lady is in a terrible state, as you see,"

The old woman, as he pointed to her, was rocking to and fro, and moaning feebly to herself. The boy by her side, however, remained quite unmoved, sitting motionless, staring into space.

"You will do it, of course," his wife affirmed softly.

He shook his head and scratched his bare chest.

"No," he said, "she cannot pay enough."

"What can she give?"

"Three hundred rupees. I want five."

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"But she is very poor—look at her," Mrs Moung Gyaw remarked pitifully.

"I cannot help that. I also am poor; besides, you never know these Jungle people. More often than not, they have plenty of money hidden away in some hole in the ground."

The old woman had raised her head, and was glancing sorrowfully from one to the other of the speakers. She put up her hands as in prayer and addressed Mrs Moung Gyaw, evidently divining her attitude to be a sympathetic one.

"What does she say?" she asked him eagerly.

"She says that her grandson is so young; that he meant no harm; that life is very fair in its morning; that death is too great a penalty for an act which was the result of jealousy; that he cared for the girl greatly, but she angered him to madness. She says that she is over seventy years old, and that it is hard to live so long only to see what one loves die miserably. She thinks that I alone can save him."

"Kywin Thwe," he continued, addressing the clerk, "ask her where her money is."

Though he spoke in English, the old lady appeared to understand, for she began hurriedly to undo a handkerchief that was knotted at her waist, and to take from out of many rolls of silk a dirty cloth, in which were tied many rupees and some grimy notes. Clasping them lovingly, she crawled forward on her stomach and laid them at Moung Gyaw's feet. She said nothing,

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but her appealing glance and quivering lip spoke for her.

"Poor old thing! you must help her," his wife whispered; "it is all she has."

Moung Gyaw said nothing, but he picked up the bag of money. The old woman's expression brightened.

"Tell her," he said, speaking to the clerk, "to go to the town and borrow two hundred more and bring them to me, and then I will talk long and much in the court-house."

This the clerk immediately translated.

"What did you say?" Mrs Moung Gyaw enquired.

"That I will think about it," he replied.

Just then a low wail broke from the woman.

"Oh, thakin, thakin!" she cried, her arms stretched forth imploringly.

"Tell her to be quiet and to go away," Moung Gyaw cried angrily.

"Thakin, thakin!" she repeated miserably.

"You must go," Kywin Thwe said imperiously, poking her with his walking-stick. She, not daring to disobey, gathered herself up slowly and sorrowfully, and, followed by the boy, moved away with lagging steps down the drive.

"You are cruel," Mrs Moung Gyaw remarked, watching the receding figure in its faded shabby dress.

"I'm nothing of the kind," he retorted; "you don't know what you are talking about."

Then he called for the evening paper. She went

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within, and sat down and took up a book. She heard him give the order to the khansamah for a cocktail with gin, chartreuse, crushed ice, and cayenne pepper. He enumerated the ingredients twice carefully on his fingers; then he lay back with a self-satisfied expression to await its coming. She laid down her book and watched him for a few seconds with very conflicting expressions in her eyes, which, had he seen, might have given him plentiful food for reflection.

Presently the cocktail, a horrible-looking compound, made its appearance. He swallowed it at a gulp, gave an order for another, and wiped his mouth on his coat. Then he shouted for the coachman and the syce, and when they came, held an animated conversation in Hindustani about nothing at all, while he drank two more cocktails and struck the mali for passing too near his chair.

As it began to grow dark, he rose and came into the house.

"I am going to sleep now," he said, addressing his wife; "I will have my dinner when I wake." He seemed somewhat fuddled.

"Don't you dine with us?" she asked, looking up at him.

"No," he answered; "I don't care to dine at the same table with Shwè Ban. They lose respect for one."

She said nothing, and he went, with uncertain steps, holding firmly on to the banister, up the uncarpeted

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stairs. She heard him cross the room overhead and throw himself, with a heavy thud, upon the creaking wooden bed.

Presently Shwè Ban returned, and he and she sat and talked till nearly dinner-time, and she tried to forget the existence of the recumbent figure in his room above.

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CHAPTER XXIII

ABOUT an hour later the old Burmese woman returned, this time alone, and making her way to where Mrs Moung Gyaw and Shwè Ban sat—just inside the door—prostrated herself full-length on the ground, muttering quickly, but directing her glance towards Mrs Moung Gyaw.

"What is it she says, Shwè Ban?" the latter asked. "Talk to her."

He came forward and questioned the old woman, who answered him eagerly and volubly; after which, he said to his sister-in-law:

"She says that she cannot get the two hundred rupees anywhere; that she has tried many places and failed. She says also that when one is old and very poor, people do not care. She implores of the thakin to speak for her boy. She will work always to pay off the two hundred, and, if she cannot do it, her relations in the village will help."

"Poor old creature!" Mrs Moung Gyaw murmured pitifully. "Shall I go and ask him?" she said, turning

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to Shwè Ban, while the old woman watched them both thirstily with her dim eyes, as if her very life depended on their decision.

Shwè Ban looked doubtful.

"He won't do it," he answered; "he is very hard about fees."

"One can but try," she replied, and she rose and went upstairs, while he explained that she had gone to persuade the sahib. In less than five minutes she returned.

"I could do nothing," she said; "he is very cross, and says that she and her ravings can go to h—ll. Tell her kindly that he cannot go," she added; and he did so.

At first the old woman seemed dazed; then, when she understood, she gave one despairing cry, and sobbed as if her heart would break. It was a most painful sight. Mrs Moung Gyaw turned away. All this unavailing suffering for the sake of two hundred rupees! What a remorseless thing money was! Shwè Ban spoke roughly to her, and she seemed to rally; she raised herself slowly. She threw her grey hairs back out of her eyes, and stared at them both, while the tears rolled down her furrowed cheeks. Then she drew her tamein round her, and muttering something, passed away out of sight like a shadow; and the darkness covered her.

"What did she say?" Mrs Moung Gyaw asked with emotion.

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"She thanked you," he answered. "She said that her life was over, because her boy had trusted her and she had failed him."

"Where is Boss?" Shwè Ban asked, as they sat down to dinner at half-past eight o'clock.

"He is sleeping; he is tired," she replied. He had been snoring heavily as she passed his door on her way down.

"He seems to be always sleeping," Shwè Ban exclaimed, commencing his soup.

"Yes, he certainly takes a lot of rest," she admitted. "He says it is his big brain that requires more nourishment than those of lesser mortals." Whereat her companion laughed outright.

"He is almost quaint in some ways," he said.

"He is certainly inclined to garb himself in pleasant illusions — which is a mistake," she made answer.

Then they conversed on other subjects.

Just as they had finished dessert, the khansamah announced that the sahib was awake and wished them to go and sit on the verandah with him.

"Will you have coffee up there?" Mrs Moung Gyaw asked Shwè Ban; to which he replied "yes." Then they rose from the table. They found Moung Gyaw seated on the verandah with nothing but a very short loonygee on—one that, indeed, was hardly more than a loin cloth.

"I thought you were never coming," he grumbled.

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His eyes were red, and his hand, as it rested on the chair, trembled.

His wife remained standing, looking at him coldly.

"Sit down," he cried fretfully.

"Not unless you put a coat on," she answered him.

"D——n you and your coat! it's a hot night," he said, in evidently the worst of ill-humours. "Isn't she cursedly unreasonable?" he exclaimed, appealing to Shwè Ban, who stood in the doorway.

"No," he answered, "I don't think so." He spoke reluctantly; he dreaded being dragged into a controversy.

"Oh, very well," he conceded; "I suppose I have got to submit to being bullied as usual. Go and fetch a coat, as you are so particular," he added, addressing her.

She went to his room and brought a mauve silk jacket, into which she helped him.

"What is the time?" he asked abruptly.

"Half-past nine," his brother answered, looking at his watch.

"I will dine at ten o'clock," he said.

"Far better for you to take dinner now," Mrs Moung Gyaw suggested. "The dinner only spoils in the hot plate; besides, it's hardly fair on the servants."

"Who cares for the servants?"

"No one that I know of," she replied; "still, when one only keeps a small household, it simply means that when one is unreasonable in one's demands, they make you pay for it in some other way."

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"Pay! One always pays," Moung Gyaw exclaimed. "Call the khansamah, and I'll have my dinner now," he added; "meanwhile, I'll have a gin-and-bitters."

"Wait and eat something first," she whispered. She dreaded the effect of any more stimulant on him just then.

"D——n it all, I say; I'll have a gin-and-bitters. What harm is there in that?" he demanded fiercely.

"It's bad for you, that's all." She spoke quite firmly.

She looked over at her brother-in-law, but he was smoking silently, and his face was unrevealing.

"Shwè Ban," she said, "tell him that it is bad for him—you know that it is." At which possibly ill-judged speech Moung Gyaw became perfectly livid.

"How dare you ask him to tell me anything?" he shouted; "a low, cheating sua in Government employ, who would take bribes if he wasn't afraid"; and he glared ferociously across at Shwè Ban, who went on calmly smoking.

"Don't take any notice," she entreated.

"I'm not going to," he said.

Then Mrs Moung Gyaw called for the khansamah, who came running up.

"Gin-and-bitters Juldi," Moung Gyaw demanded, "and then dinner."

There was complete silence while the servant was away. When he returned, Moung Gyaw's hand shook so that he could not hold the glass to his mouth. The

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khansamah had to do it for him. After this, the man prepared to spread a white cloth on the table.

"I don't want a cloth," his master said; "I'll have my plate here," and he crossed the two wooden flaps of the long chair on which he was sitting. "Khani qua hi?" he enquired.

"Soup hi, mutchi fry hi, mutton roast hi, doss curry hi," the khansamah answered gravely.

"Curry lao!" was the brief order. Then he leant back and twirled his toes. In a very few minutes a boy came with the covered dishes, which the khansamah uncovered and served. Moung Gyaw sat up and helped himself liberally, but with an ill grace, rattling the spoons noisily as a sign of displeasure. His wife and Shwè Ban were talking together and not looking at him. He proceeded to mix the curry and rice well together, adding pickled onions and dried fish, as well as some mysterious Burmese adjuncts which were handed to him in China saucers on a red lacquer tray. Then he carefully piled up a great spoonful of a bit of everything on his plate, patting it down so as to get all at one gulp. Then he eyed it critically, and carrying it half-way to his mouth, balanced it for a moment, and, with the celerity of a conjurer, popped it into his mouth, dexterously saving a few grains of rice and gravy that ran out of the corner of his lips. Presently he spilt some on the floor.

"Clean it up," the master spluttered out, addressing the khansamah and pointing to the ground.

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"That is sweepers' work," the khansamah answered quite respectfully.

"You sua qua butcha hi!" screamed Moung Gyaw; "what are you but a d——d coolie sweeper?" With which, he seized the two curry dishes that stood at his elbow, and flung their contents straight in the khansamah's face.

The man said nothing, but, covering his streaming countenance with his hand, walked straight off the verandah, across the big room, down the stairs, and out of the bungalow. Moung Gyaw saw him go with a dazed, stupid expression; then he laughed.

"That's how I treat such swine," he cried, and turned for approval to his brother and wife, who had watched the proceeding aghast. "Don't you give him a character," he said, addressing her, and indicating the departing servant by jerking his thumb over his shoulder.

"Certainly I shall," she replied defiantly. "He shall not suffer because you are a coward and a drunkard." Her eyes seemed to blaze with storm.

"Oh, you will, will you?" he shouted savagely. "Well then, take that!" and he hurled the remaining dish across the space that divided them; but it was badly aimed, and fell broken at her feet.

She put out her hand in self-defence.

"I will not stay with you," she cried, and a great sob rose in her throat.

Then she turned and fled, leaving the two brothers to face each other.

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With but little real consciousness, except a passionate desire to escape, she rushed down the stairs and out into the night, and, heedless of possible snakes, passed, bareheaded and in the thinnest shoes, down the drive and on to the lonely dusty road beyond. It was pitch-dark, but she forgot to feel afraid, while the slight breeze that rustled in the tops of the swaying palms was welcome to her. She walked far and fast through the thick dust. She was in that state of febrile nervousness when the limbs move without the will, in an involuntary desire to find an escape from mental pain in physical exertion.

Her first definite thought was that she would never return, that she would go anywhere or do anything rather than continue to live with him; but her next brought the bitter realisation that she was an exile without money or friends, and that she carried an unborn life. Without that she would have been free. Her heart swelled. She felt that with that hateful burden she was indeed caged, and her soul revolted at the inexorable humiliation of it. Perhaps at no time of her married life did she suffer more acutely or more unavailingly than at that moment. A sense of entire helplessness and unending despair seemed to enclose her, for which there were no words and no possible remedy.

She must have gone fully a mile before she at last slackened speed. Just ahead were the faint twinkling lights of a small village that she often passed when

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driving. The beating of a tom-tom proclaimed some tamacha was going forward, while, borne on the breeze from the backward distance, came the sound of wheels. She paused, almost overcome with fatigue. A few seconds later, a gharri, driven at a great rate, overtook her, from which Shwè Ban hastily sprang. He looked scared and white in the light of the lamp. In fact, his face was overspread with that ashy pallor that only dark skins know.

"What a fright you have given us," he said hoarsely, "you silly old thing! *Please* get in."

He held the carriage door open. She hesitated. She shrank from the idea of returning; it seemed so weak, so ignominious an ending, and yet there was no other way. He helped her gently, and gave the wondering coachman the word. She said nothing, but she was trembling as if with cold. Then a curious feeling of aloofness overcame her, everything seemed to be floating away on a white misty sea, her head fell back against the cushion, and for the first time in her life she fainted.

The weeks following immediately on that night were wretched indeed—a submerged scene upon which, even at this length of space, she does not care to dwell, when her life seemed to lie like ashes about her feet. Gradually all her youth seemed to fall away; she felt sad, and she felt quite old. The days passed, monotonous and alike. The twin devils of weakness and of drink appeared to have fastened on Moung Gyaw as if they never intended letting go their prey; and

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although the tumult of his fury had subsided immediately after his wife's exit that night, and fear had taken its place, when she reappeared he felt once more quite secure, and therefore appeared sullen—the last refuge of a nature too weak to own itself in the wrong. In spite of what had happened, his heart was not a whit more accessible to reform or penitence or shame; in fact, he wrapped himself in a certain defiant reserve. Distorted by his pet vice and other evil passions, Moung Gyaw grew less and less amenable to any sort of censure or suggestion, however kindly put.

After that time, was it wonderful if his wife began to feel as if she had reached the brink of a precipice and lacked the courage to look over?

Every Alpine traveller knows full well those grassy hill-faces, more dangerously seductive than cliff or snow slope, and to whose account so many debts must be entered. In these there is, according to those who know, one point, which, if the victim reaches, it is not only impossible for him to retrace his steps, but equally impossible to arrest his progress to destruction. To such a stage in the moral abyss Moung Gyaw had undoubtedly come.

He rapidly grew more obstinate, more reticent, and more difficult to approach; he went out a great deal into the district on cases. The fact was, his practice was fast diminishing in Rangoon itself, though he would never have acknowledged it. Rangoon had its prejudices, and the Courts their limitations, while before

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myooks, dispensing justice in forsaken spots, all things become possible.

At this time Mrs Moung Gyaw withdrew herself more and more from any contact with the outside world. She felt always ill, and had that desire for solitude that most wounded creatures have. Of the Rooneys at this time she saw nothing, though she knew that he and they met frequently. She spent her days in reading, and her evenings alone. Moung Gyaw never by any chance dined with her; while the Sundays were still more dreadful, for he slept the entire day, and only awakened to eat and drink himself into slumber once more. She suffered as only a person can suffer who finds no consolation in human companionship, nor any outlet in confidence.

One morning, as she sat listlessly by her writing-table, a ticca gharri drove suddenly up, from which the Burman clerk descended, and sent word by the khansamah, craving five minutes' interview. It was so unusual a proceeding, that she dreaded some accident, and bade him come up at once: she feared she knew not what.

"What is it, Monug Kywin Thwe?" she asked kindly, seeing that he lingered in some confusion in the entrance.

Thus encouraged, the Burman, salaaming profoundly, advanced a few steps; then, glancing quickly round to see that no one listened, he said, going straight to the point at once:

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"It is about the sahib. He drinks too much. All the clients are talking."

He paused; he wondered if he was doing right. She had grown scarlet with shame, and was silent. He went on hurriedly, but in good English:

"Memsahib, when master cannot walk straight, will you keep him away from office? To-day, yesterday, the day before, he was like that. I feel ashamed to see the master's shame before the clerks and the Burmans." Once more he paused abruptly.

"I will do my best," she said, "but the master likes his own way."

The Burman nodded his head in acquiescence of that.

"Yes," he replied, "master always likes his own way. That is true. But, if the memsahib will only do her best, all will be well."

He glanced towards her almost appealingly. To him it seemed impossible that her will would not also be his master's.

"You may rely upon me," she told him now; whereat the brown pock-marked face brightened wonderfully; his confidence in her was so obvious, while any lingering doubts about the wisdom of his own action seemed to be swept away. Without another word, he once again salaamed, and withdrew as suddenly and noiselessly as he had come.

"Her best!" There was mockery in the very echo of the words. She who had failed in all ways! Her mouth trembled with pain and scorn. "Her best!"

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She whose influence was nought! And that reflection perhaps surpassed all others in unavailing wretchedness.

She rose and paced the long room to and fro with slow step and beating brain. Why had the Almighty assigned her a destiny so widely removed from all others, so out of all proportion to her strength or her endurance? Yet she had more of both in her than she well knew. And it seems to me that the affairs of no person are desperate, if only they select and hold to two words—Courage and Charity.

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CHAPTER XXIV

"WHAT shall I do about the baby clothes?" she asked him one day, when the subject could be no longer postponed.

"What a nuisance it is!" he exclaimed inconsequently. Then he enquired: "Where is the best place to get them?"

"The Convent, of course; but that would be ready money," she replied.

"Then that's impossible. To me at present even the bazaar money is an effort," he rejoined quickly.

"Can I go to Rowe & Co.?" she suggested.

"I suppose so," he conceded reluctantly, "although there is a fairly large bill owing there; however, you must only risk it. Buy as little and as cheaply as you can." And he went back to the perusing of the brief that he held in his hand.

"Well, then," she pursued after a while, "there is the question of the nurse. I dislike the idea of an Eurasian one very much."

"We can get a Karen trained nurse that Kywin

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Thwe knows," he replied. "I'll see about it to-morrow."

She gave a sigh of relief; it was a disagreeable duty done and over.

A few days later, the father, whose arrival had been delayed, came from Akyab, and Moung Gyaw was very busy attending on him. Chundera's claim for three thousand rupees had to be pressed, and for once Moung Gyaw had to go to work, much against his will, by himself to obtain it, without any assistance from others. The old man, who was deeply disgusted and incensed at the whole transaction, refused once and for ever to speak to or deal directly with Poona Chundera, whom he described as a "Chittagonian money-lender," than which there can be no greater insult.

It took a whole week, and that week filled with stormy and lengthy interviews, before the old gentleman at last consented to discharge what was most undoubtedly a very unjust and disgraceful claim. He then departed for Mandalay in high dudgeon, having delivered himself most forcibly of several very far from flattering comments on his son's behaviour in the matter. In fact, he did not scruple to say and repeat that he thought that his mortgaging the bungalow at all was most dishonest, whereat Moung Gyaw was furious, but perforce silent. Chundera pocketed the money with a deprecating shrug of his loose shoulders and a receptive grin.

Moung Gyaw returned home with a brow of thunder,

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He felt that he had been infamously used and most unjustly censured, more especially as for the last seven days fear of his parent's wrath had kept him unusually moderate in his consumption of whisky.

"We can go for a drive now, if you wish it," he said to his wife; "the father has gone to Mandalay." Their carriage had been lent to him during his stay.

"Yes, I would like some air," she answered. She looked pale and haggard in the strong afternoon light.

"Was the father very angry?" she asked him later on, as they went towards the Lakes. He had not as yet told her anything.

"He was furious," he declared; "and to make it worse, he has just lost fifteen thousand rupees on a consignment of tobacco that took fire in a wharf here some three days ago."

"He was insured, though?"

"No, he never insures; he doesn't believe in it."

"How extraordinary!" she remarked.

"He is extraordinary," Moung Gyaw agreed with conviction, and then there was a long silence between them, during which she perceived that he had dropped off to sleep, and presently began snoring gently. She sat up very straight and pretended not to see it.

So they made the circuit of the Lakes, with his head rolling from side to side, and hat tilted over his eyes. There were several people out, and she thought that she could almost hear their amused remarks on the absurd figure that he cut. The last few occasions when they

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had driven together he had done precisely the same thing, but it had not mattered so much, because they had taken a lonely road. She did her best to rouse him, but he only slumbered the sounder.

They went home to the bungalow, and Flagram came across to dine for the first time since that memorable night. Even the tame vulgarity of his society was somewhat in the nature of a welcome break in the monotony of their existence. Moung Gyaw dined with them, but went to sleep immediately afterwards, leaving his wife to talk to his guest. She did not think it necessary to offer any apology—as, indeed, it was not. At about half-past ten o'clock the sleeper awoke, and rising, went straight upstairs, without a word of good-night.

"It's only Moung's way," the visitor remarked, and himself took his departure a few minutes later.

Mrs Moung Gyaw got into a kimono, and, arranging a reading-lamp, sat down with a book. She dreaded going to bed, because her sleep had been so broken of late, and haunted by the most disordered of dreams, so startling and disturbing that the dawn often found her with wide-open, staring eyes, and a cold sweat standing in great drops upon her brow.

"It was the result of too busy and speculative a brain," the doctors had said when consulted.

She read on now till the clock struck twelve, and the lamp began to show signs of flickering, when she was startled to hear the sound of footsteps and voices in the compound. She listened for a second, then

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rose and opened the shuttered window; the night was very dark and she could see no one, but a whispered converse was quite audible. She called to the watchman in Hindustani, and asked who was there; he appeared from under the shelter of the verandah.

"It is a Burmese girl to see the sahib," he answered in his deep, solemn tones.

"What does she want?" Mrs Moung Gyaw demanded sharply.

"How should thy servant know? She says that she would speak with the Most High."

"Wait," she said; "I will tell the sahib."

She closed the window, and the lean figure with its swinging lamp moved back into its place. She went into her husband's room; he slept heavily, and it was with much difficulty she roused him, and then only partially.

"Moung!" she exclaimed, shaking him by the shoulder, "there is a Burmese girl below who wishes to see you."

"Shend her up," he murmured sleepily, not knowing what he said. "Ish alwysh told durwan, shend girl up."

She turned on the lamp, and the light flashing suddenly across his face helped to wake him.

"What was it you said?" he asked; "I did not understand."

"There is a Burmese girl below to see you," she repeated.

'A Burmese girl!" he repeated, starting violently,

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and at the same time scrambling hastily out of bed. "What does she want?"

"I don't know," she answered.

"I will speak to her," he cried. He seemed disturbed and anxious, but it somehow escaped her notice.

"Is she to come up?" she asked.

"No," he said, as he slipped into a loonygee and coat. Then he went into the outer room, and leaning over the verandah, called to the durwan to ask the girl to stand where he could see her; whereupon a slim girl stepped out into the circle of light made by the powerful hurricane lamp that was held by an evil-looking Indian who accompanied her.

She wore a red velvet tamein, which is usually the sign of one who leads a loose life; she also wore several bracelets, and appeared very young and good-looking, somewhat in the style of a bazaar seller. Moung Gyaw addressed her in hurried accents, and felt thankful that his wife had never followed the suggestion he once made about learning Burmese.

The girl answered excitedly, and used many gestures. Their conversation was short, and apparently far from agreeable. She shrugged her shoulders impatiently. He was evidently conciliatory; he seemed to be even persuasive. Finally, evidently grumbling, she took her departure, followed by her attendant.

"What did she want?" his wife asked him as he banged the shutters to, the truth never so much as dawning on her.

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"Oh, she came about a case," he replied, with a ready lie. "It was a great liberty," he added, as he went over to the table and proceeded to pour some brandy into a glass, while his hand and wrist shook like a bulrush.

It seemed curious that a Burmese girl should come to a barrister's bungalow about a case in the dead of night. Still, she believed in him; but even had the excuse been less plausible, she would have hardly cavilled or questioned. Such was not her way at any time. No one ever carried out with greater abandonment the fine old principle of

> Trust me all in all,
> Or trust me not at all.

Moung Gyaw went to bed, feeling very glad to think that his wife's suspicions were not aroused, otherwise it might have been unpleasant for him.

After that incident, which, under more fortunate circumstances, might have been the means of giving her her freedom, a strange reaction set in with Moung Gyaw, and, for the time being, overcame and, to a certain extent, sobered him.

His tone towards her, which hitherto had been one of profound indifference, grew almost at times insolent. He seemed to take pleasure in passing small but marked slights on her; he would do his best to force the most unwelcome of attentions on her; he grew coarse in language, and coarser far in behaviour.

There was now a gulf between them that her for-

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giveness would never span—that, indeed, whilst they lived, would never be closed again. Tears of blood rose to her eyes, and she wept long and hopelessly during those last weeks before the child was born.

Nevertheless, though as yet she knew it not, she had cast many things behind her. She was fast reaching the dregs in the cup of her life; the time fast approaching was to atone, and so the last days of May dragged by — a time of weary waiting that taxed her ebbing strength severely.

She would sit idly for hours at a time, her attitude one of extreme weariness, and think and think; and undoubtedly it was then that many problems solved themselves for her unaided.

Those arbitrary words, right or wrong, as she had hitherto understood them, began to lose much of their significance. She had arrived at the time when she saw all the fallacy of the past, and when she desired only courage enough to grasp the wisdom of the future. Meanwhile, she was developing rapidly into a woman—a woman, too, who would possibly not be easily induced to make a further compromise with things.

Of these drifting thoughts and half-formed conclusions, that were destined so much to shape her after-destiny, Moung Gyaw guessed nothing; in fact, at that time he was drinking harder than ever, but chiefly alone; he seldom asked any one within the doors. The occasional uproarious joviality and childish vanity, that awhile back used to half-annoy and half-divert

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his intimates, began to disappear entirely, and he was always moody, when not noisily quarrelsome. On that subject, however, his wife had that mute indifference which belongs to absolute despair. She had done all that she could, and she had failed; while now the physical apathy—though her brain was ever awake—consequent on her condition, left her, perhaps mercifully, without the strength even to care.

Early in June the baby, a girl, was born, and now comes the most curious part of this story, namely, the strange, unaccountable, but profound and, I personally am disposed to think, most natural dislike with which that child filled her. The mere sight of it in the arms of the little, smiling, gentle Karen nurse hurt her curiously, while its shrill cries cut through her every nerve, and almost stopped the pulses of life within her. Was it, think you, so very extraordinary, seeing the intolerable memories it awoke, that she should have felt thus? Was it not the living result of what to her now was a hideous tie — a monstrous bondage?

Not so its father. He was more like a lunatic than a sane man in his attitude of admiration and surprise before the purely imaginary beauties of an infant, for whom he seemed to hold himself solely responsible. He devoted his leisure moments to gazing at it; he was never tired of asking questions of the nurse; he declared that he already saw a likeness to himself; in fact, for at least a week he appeared to be suffering

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from incipient softening of the brain, consequent on gratified vanity.

His wife he hardly noticed; she had lost all significance in his sight. She was not sorry; she was so glad to be alone at last; she felt as if half a century of doubt and desolation had rolled away from her. It was a strangely peaceful interlude, when she lay there under the slowly swaying punkah, and realised that once more after many months she belonged to herself again. By her own wish, during the day, she was left much alone. In the morning and the evening they brought the baby on a pillow to show her. It was a somewhat noticeable fact that though she spoke about its food and general welfare, she never then or after touched or kissed it. Something held her back—something not to be dissected or put into words; some feeling so involuntary and so deep-rooted as to come from the centre of her very being. It grieved her a little as the days passed on, but she could not help it: it would not go. She would have preferred to have been able to like it; but it was not to be.

The dislike came unbidden, and it stayed and strengthened. She was too frank to be able to disguise it under any hypocritical mask of assumed affection; so the servants babbled of it in shocked whispers, and gradually so did others—all being proportionately scandalised.

Rangoon figuratively threw up its hands, anything unusual being, from its limited point of view, nothing

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short of criminal. The legitimate in every way is the only realm that Rangoon comprehends. Of this she was well aware, but she did not care for outside opinion; things with her had gone too far, and people had been too unkind, for her to feel anything but the most profound indifference for either their censure or their praise.

On the eighth day Moung Gyaw came back very late from office and went straight to her room; it was a dreadful night, the rain flooding everywhere, and heavy thunder in the air.

"I am very worried," he told her, without any preface; "Dr Tomkins has called in my debt to him."

He stood at the end of the bed, and his expression was a very troubled one.

"And you can't pay it?" she said.

"No," he declared impatiently, "nor even any part of it."

"How much is it?" she enquired anxiously.

"Oh, I don't know exactly," he replied evasively. Never at any time would he and truth meet at close quarters. "It's probably a little over a thousand pounds."

Her eyes opened wide.

"What can we do? Can you transfer it?"

He hesitated.

"I don't know," he rejoined.

"How wearing debt is!" she observed involuntarily.

"I don't usually let it trouble me," he answered.

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"If Kywin Thwe was here now instead of being away, I should let him settle it."

"How much do you think you owe altogether?" his wife demanded, seizing this opportunity of trying to elicit some information on that much-vexed question.

"Monug Kywin Thwe knows exactly. I suppose about a lakh," he affirmed indifferently.

She was silent. Her eyes closed for a moment, as if to hold in unshed tears, while Moung Gyaw went into the outer room, and brought a long chair for himself, and a whisky-and-soda.

A long pause ensued, while he half-smoked a cigar; then he threw it from him, and rose abruptly.

"It is disgraceful that I should be worried," he exclaimed fretfully; he honestly thought it was, too. "I shall drive down and see Chundera; he will put it right." And, without waiting for any comment, away he went.

When a crisis came, it was ever the same—he failed; and, lacking sense and courage, shunted the burden to other shoulders. She wondered if ever in his clearest hours, which grew rarer, he ever thought of the hopes he had disappointed or the affections he had misused. But no: she felt sure that he did not. Any moans or regrets of his were always purely selfish.

She half-rose in her bed; she felt restless and disturbed.

A lakh! What a weight to carry! And he could never pay the principal; she doubted if he even managed the interest. What wild folly were these debts, incurred

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for no reason save the pitiful one of display and straining after stage-effect! And he had plunged into it all recklessly, joyously, with no thought or care for consequences—self, and the gratification of the moment, ever uppermost. She leant back on her pillows for a brief space, and let her heavy eyelids droop over her tired eyes. Then again she roused herself, suddenly realising that the time for dreaming was over, the peaceful interlude of the last few days ended; there was work and plenty to be done. To-morrow she would rise and gather up the threads again, before they tangled past the unravelling.

An hour passed, and then he returned; he was radiant. Chundera, like the good fellow that he was, had relieved him at once of all anxiety.

"And the price?"

"None—none at all," he answered hastily and resentfully.

She smiled a slight, mysterious smile, the import of which was lost on him.

"He has turned philanthropist," she said.

"At any rate, he does not make anything out of me," Moung Gyaw asserted; "only, I fancy he wants me to take his son-in-law into the office."

"I don't think one would have to seek far at any time for Mr Chundera's motives. Scratch a Russian, and you find a Tartar; if one scratched a Bengali, I wonder what one would find? Probably the decaying carcase of a dead chetty."

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He did not answer, but went to his own room to change. He felt infinitely relieved. He never counted the cost of that relief, nor for a moment dwelt on it; he banished it from his mind.

Two hours later he staggered to bed, blind and dead to all memories.

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CHAPTER XXV

THE following Sunday, when the Karen nurse had left, and the ayah, who had taken her place in attendance on the baby, wanted leave for a few hours, Mrs Moung Gyaw offered to mind it. That was just after luncheon; Moung Gyaw was sleeping, and she was alone. There was a heavy noon-day silence everywhere; the compound lay wrapped in hot yellow luminance, the branches of the trees hung motionless as if carved out of stone, the punkah was swaying more feebly every moment—it was evident that the coolie was nodding—and she sat quite still, watching the sleeping baby curiously, dreamily, while she rocked the wicker cradle with her foot. The small creature was covered with prickly heat, and its face wore a strange puckered expression, the little fists being closely doubled. Now and then it moaned fretfully; then she rocked the cradle faster, in dread and fear that it should cry. No one could understand how that one rasping baby cry jarred her; extremely sensitive to noise at all times, nothing had ever hurt or irritated her like that, and nothing ever would, of that she felt sure.

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A flock of thoughts came to her as she sat there: they wandered hither and thither, but, flutter where they would, like birds fastened to threads of uneven length, they eventually reverted to the same idea, and that was the active dislike with which the child filled her.

True, she would not have hurt it knowingly, but she wished it dead, even as she had always wished before it was born. "After all," she reflected, "Goethe was right when he said that even the best of us at one time or other are capable of crime. Only, one ought to be Goethe, to acknowledge so much."

After awhile Moung Gyaw's snores in the adjoining room ceased; he rolled out of bed, and came and stood beside the cradle, gazing down admiringly at its occupant.

"You ought to love it," he observed to his wife, nodding his head in the direction of the baby.

"Why?" she enquired wearily, vague regrets oppressing her.

"Because all mothers love their children," he said, and he pushed the cradle faster with his bare brown toe.

"What a very unconvincing argument!" she replied. "Unhappily, I am that exceptionable exception which is supposed to prove the rule."

Inwardly she thought: "It is yours, that is why I cannot care—why I shall never care."

"That is very wrong," he asserted severely.

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"I know it is," she replied indifferently; "I expect I am what the good people would call wicked."

"Yes, I think you are," he exclaimed, continuing to look at the sleeping child.

Was she wicked? she wondered; was any one ever really so? Was there anything in life beyond impatience, fatigue, love of power, and a dominating instinctive egotism? Aloud she said:

"Then you think maternity is born in every woman, and is wholly apart and uninfluenced by time or place or circumstances?"

"Yes," he reiterated, "I think that it is born in every *good* woman."

His attitude amused her somewhat. Moung Gyaw assuming the highly moral tone was diverting, but she did not continue the subject. She did not care to voice her own rather unusual opinion, and then have to listen to a string of platitudes on the obligations of maternity.

She believed firmly that the often exaggerated pride—his pride, for instance—in offspring, was but an extremely common form of personal vanity; while as to the instinct of mother-love being inborn in every woman, it was the most puerile of delusions, the most illogical of all human fallacies. These thoughts, differing so widely from the commonly accepted notions on the same subject, she wisely kept to herself. Still, if one loved the father, one would inevitably love the child; but not otherwise—at least, in her case never otherwise.

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"If you wish to go for a drive," he said somewhat later, "I will mind the child till the ayah comes back."

"Would you not like to go out too?" she asked.

"No; I shall remain at home, and look up a case."

She rose. The idea was very welcome to her; it was so long since she had had any fresh air. As it was, the confinement to the bungalow had robbed her face of all colour, and her eyes of all brightness.

"Thanks, very much; then, if you don't mind, I will go," she answered. And having ordered the gharri to be got ready, she slipped into a long, loose dust-cloak, and put on a shady hat. She felt almost excited; it would be her first outing for seven weeks. Then, how ill and miserable she had been feeling! while now, the glad strength of returning health stirred in her veins, as the sap in young trees.

Her brain, though ever active, seemed to her to be only now awaking after long torpor. She went out and down to where the carriage waited. When she reached the top of the stone steps, she heard the baby cry sharply; she paused irresolute for a second—should she?—then she went on in the sunset warmth of the damp clear evening.

She felt a distinct pleasure as the horses bore her swiftly through the still air, past the Cantonments and away by the river-side, where the homeward-bound ships rode at anchor on the shining waters; then back through the native quarter, where everything was bright and lively after the rain, and full of gaiety

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and colour. She forgot many things, and her spirits revived. She was interested and diverted. On her way she stopped at The Manse and paid a visit to the wife of the Rev. Mr Moreton, with whom, since a certain memorable night long before, she had kept up a cordial acquaintance. Mrs Moung Gyaw lingered chatting with her for some time, till other people returning from church began to drop in. Then she took her departure.

She was cheered, refreshed, invigorated; and it was with quite a light step that she walked up the drive on her return. She would surmount and conquer things yet.

Darkness had fallen, the lamps were turned full on, and shone brightly through the open woodwork as she approached the house. Then she entered, to find Mrs Rooney in the drawing-room, and Moung Gyaw in a long chair talking a tissue of rubbish at the top of his far from melodious voice. Her step was arrested. Her heart sank. One glance in his direction was sufficient, without the meaning look of comment that the visitor, who had risen from her chair, bestowed on her.

"I could not stay away any longer, and I wanted so much to see the child," Mrs Rooney began, and her tone was one of supplication. She carried some beautiful roses, and these she bestowed on Mrs Moung Gyaw.

"That is very kind of you," Mrs Moung Gyaw replied gently, "and the flowers are delightful." She bore no resentment; after all, Mrs Rooney only injured herself, not others.

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"She wantsh to shee the schild," Moung Gyaw muttered thickly, looking at both with a sottish stare. "Wonderful schild!" he continued; "I have just been schelling her all about it—sho like me." His bare legs were shaking to and fro.

Then he passed on to a long, confused, and utterly irrelevant rigmarole about everything and nothing. He laughed a great deal at his own remarks, gradually growing livelier and livelier; finally he got up and tried to dance, displaying his hairy legs in a most offensive fashion, while he shouted for all the household to come, to whom he talked wildly and incoherently. There was no silencing him; he was beyond all control. Mrs Moung Gyaw grew thoroughly alarmed; he had never been like this before. She looked to Mrs Rooney.

"Never mind," that lady whispered; "he will exhaust himself after awhile. Take no notice."

"We will have champagne," he cried; "we will have magnums; we will make merry; we will drink the child's health; the baby shall drink also." Saying which, he commanded the Madrasse butler to bring the wine.

When it came, he helped himself first, tossing off glass after glass. The amber fluid trickled out of his mouth in two rills. Then suddenly he grew quieter in his speech, though he still rambled at intervals, while his gaze was dull and vacant; later, he ceased to talk, but fastened his fixed, feverish stare on space.

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The pupils of his blood-shot eyes dilated. He let the glass fall from his grasp with a crash upon the floor; then, without further remark, he rose and reeled over towards the door, against which he knocked sharply, with the effect of throwing him against the other side. Standing momentarily quite erect, he managed with a mighty effort to steady himself, then staggered upstairs, swaying to and fro as he went. On reaching the room above, a heavy thud proclaimed to the listeners that he had fallen.

Both women of one accord started to their feet to go to the rescue. His wife went first, followed closely by Mrs Rooney. There he lay flat on the floor—his loonygee had fallen off—a brown, naked heap, muttering feebly that every one was unkind to him.

His wife was stunned, nauseated, and disgusted.

"What can we do?" she asked, turning helplessly towards Mrs Rooney.

"Leave him to me," was the prompt reply. "I understand, you don't. Go downstairs yourself, and keep the servants from coming up."

Mrs Rooney removed her hat and rolled up her sleeves. Mrs Moung Gyaw gave a sigh of glad relief, and obeyed gratefully, only too thankful to do as she was bidden. Half an hour of restless anxiety must have gone by before Mrs Rooney joined her.

"He is in bed," she said; "the thing will be to keep him there. He must lie up for a couple of days, or——" Her glance was significant.

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"We had better send for the doctor," Mrs Moung Gyaw answered; "he will obey him, but he most certainly won't me."

"That is what had better be done then," Mrs Rooney agreed, "because he is really very bad, and will have to be kept quiet. If you will write a note," she continued, "to Dr Sidlay, I will go and sit with him"; saying which, she went back.

"Send up some crushed ice," she cried out, when she was half-way up.

Mrs Moung Gyaw gave the order to the boy, and then sat down and wrote a short note to the doctor, and gave it to the syce to take at once. After which, she stood by her writing-table, debating whether she ought to take her turn with the watcher upstairs or not. Very brief reflection told her what to do. She went apprehensively.

He lay on the bed in a half-comatose condition; a towel was bound round his head, his eyes were wide open and looked as if they had been varnished. The boy stood on the off-side fanning him, while Mrs Rooney sat near the open window. Mrs Moung Gyaw took up her station at the foot of the bed. Silence prevailed, broken only by whispered directions on the part of Mrs Rooney — a silence that lasted almost until the noise of approaching wheels prepared them for the arrival of the doctor.

"You had better go down and see him," Mrs Rooney said; "I will wait in your room."

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Mrs Moung Gyaw went down and met Dr Sidlay just as he was descending from his buggy.

"I saw your syce on the road," he said, after she had greeted him.

"That was very fortunate," she replied, adding: "Moung Gyaw is on the sick list."

"What's he been doing?" he asked, following her into the house.

She was silent for a moment. Should she tell him outright or not? She decided not; the shame of it deterred her.

"He has been indiscreet in his diet, I think," she answered.

"Humph!" murmured the doctor, as he laid his topee down. There are occasions in life when one should speak the truth, holding nothing back. This was one. Her silence was very unwise. Then he left her to go to his patient.

When he rejoined her again, he said:

"He has fever; keep him on milk-and-soda and chicken broth, and I will send some medicine." He looked at her kindly as he spoke. There was no friendship between them, but he was sorry for her; and he had both tact and discernment. He shook her hand at parting.

"There is nothing to fear," he said reassuringly; "he will be all right in a couple of days, with rest, quiet, and no whisky." Then he was gone.

In twenty-four hours from that time Moung Gyaw was

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almost well. The magnificent constitution, with which he played so wantonly — inherited, as it was, from so many generations of perfectly simple, continent, sober progenitors — stood on every occasion nobly by him, and, I believe, still stands so. It was true that he was shaky and weak, and had a tongue like an old rusty file; but, when he awoke on the following day, he was at least quite clear-headed and very quiet. His mood was a softened one; and though he did not speak openly of the cause of his illness, still it was evident that he felt it. So she took heart of grace, and dared to hope that she might still make headway. If she could only save him now, even at this late hour! The tears rose to her eyes; she felt so profoundly on the subject.

"Moung," she ventured to say that evening, and she held his hand tightly clasped in hers as she did so, "for the child's sake, seeing that you care for it so greatly, you will give this hateful habit up?" She gazed at him with all her heart in her eyes; all the hardness that had grown up in her against him lately seemed to soften. She had no love for him, but she had—what very often stands in good stead—a great compassion.

He was silent for a few minutes; he seemed to be making some great effort. Then he said:

"For the child's sake—yes; I will."

And she, so hearing, believed yet again. O dreamer! O fool!

The English mail was late that week, and when it

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came, it brought her bad news. Her father was in failing health, and her mother urged her to return.

"He asks so often for you," she wrote; "I think if you could come, if it were only for a few weeks, he would get well. You know how precious his life is to me as well as to yourself, and how frail are the threads at his age. If he grows no better, I shall wire your passage-money, and you and the baby must come at once. Moung Gyaw will, I feel sure, put no obstacle in your way."

She received that at twelve o'clock. Moung Gyaw had gone to office for the first time since his late attack, so she was alone.

She spent a very anxious day, in which the dominant notes were the falling rain and the perpetual puling cry of the child, who was not well.

The cruellest part of receiving disquieting intelligence at so great a distance is the maddening feeling of helplessness that it engenders. One can do nothing, and one must wait a week to hear further. She would have liked to have cabled instantly, but she had no money. So she could only have patience; and patience was, to a great extent, foreign to her character.

As ill-luck would have it, in the evening Moung Gyaw did not return in his tum-tum. "He was busy, and would be late," was the message brought by the syce.

At seven he came in a ticca gharri; she went to greet him. He smelt strongly of that soul-revolting odour

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of stale spirits; he walked unsteadily. She turned away, stricken of all hope; and he, with the aid of the butler, went to bed.

An hour later a note came from the bank to say that eighty pounds had been wired from England that day, and had been placed to Mrs Moung Gyaw's credit. This is how Destiny weaves, or, at least, did weave for her.

She dined alone; his boy fed him, as he lay half-awake in bed, and never had his wife felt so avowedly disgusted with him as then. All the past seemed light as thistledown in comparison with this. It was the parting of the ways.

She spent a long, anxious, and wakeful night, he snoring loudly in the adjoining room. She would go home, that she was determined: her father, his welfare, were paramount. To her it seemed impossible that this helpless, hopeless life, to which she was chained, should have first claim. Bad enough, she thought, to face the long future with it, but in the present she would go to those whom she loved.

In the morning she spoke to him about her people, when he was awake and quite sober.

"You must go, of course," he said decidedly. He was eating limes steeped in salt, and, if truth be told, he was not sorry at the thought of her departure. "You can take the child, and leave it there," he continued, "and you can return in three months. I think that will be best."

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"Yes," she answered; then she looked steadily at him. "You broke your promise to me." The words cost her much, but she felt that she needs must utter them.

"Yes, I know I did," he retorted irritably, with a certain note of defiance.

"You will ruin yourself," she told him sadly.

He sucked a lime noisily; then he wiped his fingers, and said:

"That's my affair, and, while we are on this subject, I beg to say that, for the future, I'll have no more talk or espionage. My destiny is my own, and I claim the right to dispose of it as I will. I never make rude remarks about what you eat or drink; you must be good enough to do the same by me."

He pushed his plate away. She was silent.

"Drink is necessary to me," he pursued. "I like it, and, while I can pay for it, I will have it." His tone was in every way decisive. Then he rose and went into his room, and shut the door behind him.

She shrugged her shoulders and sighed.

Of what use?—of what use? All words, all efforts, wasted—wasted!

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CHAPTER XXVI

THERE was a ship leaving for England in three weeks' time, so she set about making her preparations almost at once.

Ten days before the appointed date the doctor announced that the child, which had not been well, would be unable to travel. July was an impossible month for the Red Sea. As he said, "Ships, in his opinion, were no places for grown-up people, but for babies they were entirely impossible. Why could she not leave the child, as she would be returning so soon?"

She listened to all that he had to say.

"You are sure it cannot go?" she asked anxiously, as he was taking his final leave.

"I am sure of it; moreover, I forbid it."

He spoke firmly; he was an extremely clever man, and one in whom she placed great confidence.

"Can you not wait till October?" he queried, as he stood in the entrance.

"No," she answered briefly; "my father is ill. I have promised; I must go."

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"But your child! She surely is——?"

"Nothing," was the startling reply. "But my parents are all."

He looked at her keenly. She was peculiar, but she interested him.

"Then you must leave it, as I say," he repeated. "It will be well looked after by the ayah, and you can have a rest." He stepped into his trap and drove away.

Here again was further weaving on the part of Destiny. Things were beginning to converge towards one end.

When she told Moung Gyaw, he said: "The nuns would take Zama. Why not leave her with them?"

So it was arranged. Wide airy rooms were allotted to the child and ayah in the Convent; everything that could conduce to the baby's comfort and health was procured; and, on the afternoon preceding her departure, Mrs Moung Gyaw drove with them to the grey-blue, pucca-built place standing back in its own gardens, with long corridors where no sound came save the pathetic, monotonous voices of the nuns.

In a large sort of salon, full of the silvery shadows of the fast-falling evening, they awaited the coming of the Reverend Mother. The baby cried fretfully, and the ayah soothed it by humming softly an Indian cradle-song. Mrs Moung Gyaw looked out on the tranquil gardens, where a few Eurasian children played noiselessly.

Presently the nun entered silently—a simple, pious Frenchwoman, with clear, grave eyes, and a pale, ascetic

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face. She greeted Mrs Moung Gyaw with a subdued welcome. This mother, who was willing to leave her child, had not the holy woman's best approval, but the baby she took into her arms and kissed.

"You will want it christened, of course?" she asked after a second or so, looking towards its mother.

"Yes, please," Mrs Moung Gyaw replied.

"Have you decided on her names?"

"Oh yes," was the answer.

"Then will you write them down?" the Reverend Mother said, pointing to some notepaper that lay on the table.

Mrs Moung Gyaw sat down and wrote "Zama Mary" very clearly, and gave the paper into the Reverend Mother's keeping.

"Zama," she explained, "is the name of an estate of her grandfather's in the Arakan Hills."

"What about some saint's name?" the nun enquired anxiously.

"Any that you like, but certainly Mary," was the reply.

There was a slight pause. It was evident that the Reverend Mother did not wish to detain her.

"I will go now," Mrs Moung Gyaw said, moving slowly towards the door, which the nun opened.

Mrs Moung Gyaw turned and patted the child's face gently.

"Good-bye, baby," she murmured softly. "You will have grown when I see you next." Prophetic words!

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"Good-bye, ayah; take care of baby," she added.

The ayah smiled and salaamed. Mrs Moung Gyaw lifted the Reverend Mother's hand to her lips, and a moment later was gone.

She looked back once as the gharri turned out of the gates. The little group still lingered in the portico, the ayah's scarlet dress making a bright splash of colour against the sombre background. She waved her handkerchief and smiled; and if she had a feeling at that moment of distinct relief from a burden lifted, a tie loosened that had galled her, no one was offended by that exhilaration, for no one was witness of it; but she, who was very prone to analyse her own emotions, did not attempt to disguise from herself that it was pure pleasure that rose in her heart. If only for a brief while, she was free. "Free!" There was a sense of dizzy magic about that one small word.

On her way home, she paused at Mrs Rooney's, to say good-bye. She felt that she could do no less. That lady received her in very scanty attire in her bedroom; her eyes were swollen and red; she had had a heavy night; and Jack — ominous sign! — had departed that afternoon for the pilot brig.

"When will you return, I wonder?" she enquired, after she had greeted Mrs Moung Gyaw and assigned her a chair.

"In October certainly—possibly before," was the answer.

"If I ever had the luck to get to England, I should

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never return," Mrs Rooney remarked, as she sat in front of the glass and cleaned her nails with an ivory picker.

"One would rather not, of course," admitted her visitor; "but when one's life lies here, one has no choice."

"It's no place for white women," was Mrs Rooney's comment, and she pursed her lips together.

Her guest looked up; she wondered what bee had so stung her to-day. As a rule, Mrs Rooney seemed to find existence quite tolerable under all circumstances.

"It is a place where life would be quite endurable if one could afford great splendour," Mrs Moung Gyaw remarked. To which Mrs Rooney, whose only idea of splendour was unlimited whisky, made no response.

"They are saying hard things of you for going away and leaving the child," she observed, after a pause.

"When do they ever say anything else of me?" asked her guest indifferently. "A whole book of lamentations anent my humble self was published long ago, and yet I survive."

"Personally, I think you are quite right to go," Mrs Rooney pursued; "any one can replace a baby, but never a father."

"You are very good," Mrs Moung Gyaw said coldly; the speech offended her taste. "But really I am afraid I have grown very callous to outside opinion—especially Rangoon's opinion."

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What, indeed, did she owe to public opinion? What had it ever done for her, except to blame her from the first, and to misjudge her always? Rangoon people had, indeed, abused her as much as if she was the climate, she thought; and the idea amused her.

"One cannot afford altogether to ignore it," Mrs Rooney propounded sententiously.

Mrs Moung Gyaw smiled a little. The speaker, if half the tales were true, had not kept its observances very strictly. Aloud she exclaimed:

"It is entirely a question of moral courage and a belief in oneself whether one does or not."

"Then you would even countenance immorality," Mrs Rooney exclaimed inconsequently, not having followed very clearly.

"Not at all!" was the reply; "but I would encourage individuality, and not have all people move in flocks." Then she added: "I feel sure that if one is only sure of oneself one can dare so much, and find happiness, independent of the whispers of the world."

To her ever-curious intelligence the so-called morality of the world was beginning to appear but a tissue of affectation and hypocrisies.

Her thoughts and conclusions on many subjects had, as we know, during those tedious months of inaction undergone a complete transition.

'What advanced notions!" Mrs Rooney remarked gravely. "I believe you'll do something extraordinary one of these days."

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Mrs Moung Gyaw laughed.

"You have no one but yourself to thank," she said, "for nearly succeeding in dragging me into a dissertation. Dissertations are dangerous things; and it is time I was thinking of going. I only just came for a moment." She rose from her chair.

"You need not go so soon, surely?"

"I must; I have many things to do."

"Daisy and I thought of coming to see you off to-morrow morning."

"Oh, please don't," Mrs Moung Gyaw exclaimed quickly; "there is nothing I should dislike more. Let us say good-bye here instead." She looked down at Mrs Rooney, who replied:

"It is a sad word to say, and I feel, somehow, as if between us it would be final." She clasped her hand round Mrs Moung Gyaw's wrist.

"Nonsense! I shall have returned before you will have realised that I have gone."

Mrs Rooney smiled faintly, doubtfully.

"One misses you before you have even started," she replied gracefully. "I shall do everything for the baby," she added; "so also will Daisy."

"He, I think, wants to be looked after more than any child," Mrs Moung Gyaw remarked sadly.

"His welfare lies in his own hands; he is too old for dictation," Mrs Rooney answered, somewhat severely.

"And he is too weak to do anything but mar it," was her listener's mental reflection.

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"I shall write to you," she said, as she moved towards the door.

"Do," Mrs Rooney exclaimed heartily; and then they kissed, with a certain amount of genuine feeling, and parted. Mrs Rooney came out as usual, and leant over the banisters to watch Mrs Moung Gyaw until the end.

"What beautiful plants you have! They are new, aren't they?" the latter said, turning at the bend of the staircase, and indicating some fine palms that were grouped in the entrance.

"Yes," Mrs Rooney cried; "your husband sent them all to Daisy about a week ago—she's delighted. The poor child is so fond of Mr Moung Gyaw." Whereat his wife smiled and passed on.

"Good-bye!" Mrs Rooney cried once more to her.

"Good-bye!" Mrs Moung Gyaw called back in reply, and then she stepped into the gharri, and drove away into the already fallen darkness. She did not look back, and again she felt that strange spontaneous feeling of relief brim up in her and sweep over her very being.

Moung Gyaw and his wife parted at the wharf the following morning. The rain was falling, and the river was enveloped in a thick mist.

"Take care of yourself," she whispered with unfeigned feeling at the last; then she took her place on the waiting launch, and it moved quickly away, snorting

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as if in anger, as it sped over the turbid waters. She watched her husband through a veil of tears, but she noticed that he did not wait for more than a moment before he turned away.

One brief hour later, and the great ship had begun to move slowly on its way across the world.

Mrs Moung Gyaw stood at her porthole and gazed out. The rain had stopped, and the sun was shining; it lit up the great pagoda as it rose in golden grandeur against the cloudy sky. She looked back with a vague regret; she thought of herself when she had last sailed down that river—then she had much of hope, both for herself and him; but now——

She continued to watch the shore steadfastly with sad, retrospective eyes, as it stretched away to the horizon in realms of sparkling light. It was a beautiful land, quite beautiful, and she forgave it much at this solemn hour of farewell, even—yes, even to the youth and the hopes of her buried away yonder; and while she so gazed, there stole across her a fleeting, curious, indefinable prescience that she was seeing it all for the last time—that something, she knew not what, would for ever prevent her return; in a word, that she had not trodden the path of disillusion in vain, that the starved past was somehow over. Yonder there awaited her a future that would be over-full, and so we will leave her while she dreams, and the ship is making fast for the open sea.

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There are some stories that are never ended while the actors live.

This is one.

There is a sequel, but its place is not here.

It lies with the coming years, and in other and far different lands.

THE END

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Pall Mall Gazette—"A cleverly-written story of more than usual interest. Mr Turner has here something to say, and says it well. From the first page onward we follow the career of Maurice Yorke with close interest, an interest which never flags, and the final chapter is in every way equal to the book's earlier promise. There is nothing slipshod, no falling off. The author has given us sterling good work throughout. The characterisation of Lady Sothern is excellent—so human withal. 'The Comedy of Progress' is a brilliant novel, its title, by the way, fitting it like a glove."

Morning Post—"Readers will be delighted with the 'Comedy of Progress,' by Reginald Turner. The story is told with skill and true artistic effect. Lady Sothern is an artistically drawn character, full of life and force. The charm and influence which she exercises over all who know her are quite convincingly expressed, and the scene with her husband when she confesses herself an old woman and stamps on her jewels, is very ably done. Mr Turner may be sincerely congratulated on accomplishing a difficult task with more restraint and ability than one generally expects in such efforts."

THE STEEPLE

Bookman—"A story of far more than average merit, strongly imagined and developed with considerable craftsmanship. . . . Emphatically, this is a book to be read."

Illustrated London News—"One reads with unflagging interest. The great merit lies in the very cool and effective demonstration of character, and especially of character that is off conventional lines. The psychology, perhaps, is not very deep, but in the plane on which it works is remarkably given. We have thoroughly enjoyed "'The Steeple.'"

Truth—"Unusually well conceived and described."

Times—"Few readers who take it up will readily lay it down. . . . Mr Turner is successful, and his sketches of men, women, and creeds are, generally speaking, humorous, shrewd, and suggestive."

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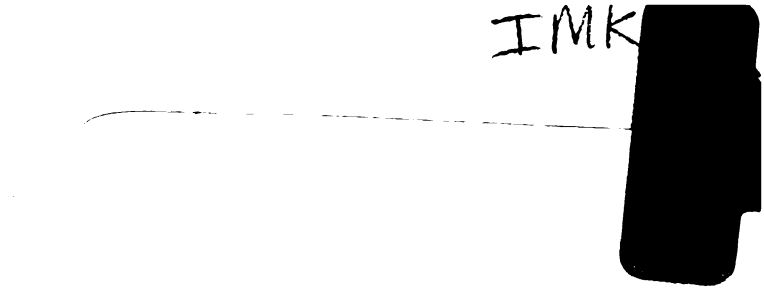

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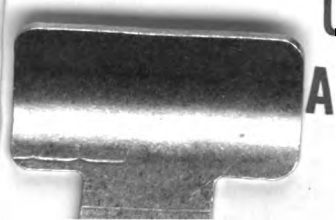

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